

VBTnews

VICTORIAN BLACKBERRY TASKFORCE

DRONE TECHNOLOGY SET TO TAKE OFF

The Victorian Government has an application process in place for a licence to pilot and operate drones for aerial spraying.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) believes this is a gamechanger, helping landholders tackle European blackberry in areas where ground-based control is difficult, impossible, or even dangerous. European blackberry often grows on steep slopes that landholders struggle to reach on foot when using a backpack or spray unit. Landholders often overcome this by building access tracks to reach and spray their blackberry. It is impossible to treat the centre of large infestations, and this is where drones can be useful.

Reducing chemical usage and ensuring the safety of people and the environment is important. Drones, by their propelled action, create downward pressure on chemical droplets, which increases overall coverage. Some studies have shown a significant reduction in the amount of chemicals and water used compared with ground-based spraying.

The VBT has been hosting drone demonstrations at community events for several years and can see the benefits in certain situations, but not all. Inappropriate use of this technology includes areas where native vegetation or sensitive horticultural crops cannot be avoided.



DRONE DEMONSTRATION - SOUTH GIPPSLAND

For information on licencing requirements for drones visit <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/chemicals/licences-and-permits/licences-for-aerial-spraying-of-agricultural-chemicals> or call Agriculture Victoria Customer Contact Centre on 136 186.

Blackberryaction



CHEMICAL CONTROL DEMONSTRATION

BLACKBERRY CONTROL DEMONSTRATIONS – SOUTH GIPPSLAND

The VBT and the South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) co-hosted three blackberry control demonstration events in February: two at the Koonwarra Cricket Ground and one at the Hallston Community Hall grounds. More than 90 people observed drone technology and “Best Practice” blackberry-control techniques and listened to informative presentations from government organisations and community groups.

Advanced UAV demonstrated drone capabilities and answered questions about licensing requirements and the benefits of this technology. People could see value in areas where access is difficult or even dangerous to tackle blackberry via ground-based techniques.

Envirogain weed control contractors demonstrated blackberry control techniques including physical, chemical, and certified organic options. Best Practice control techniques were discussed including the importance of developing a control plan and integrating control techniques. The key differences between chemicals and certified organic products such as pine oil were also identified.

Meanwhile, the SGLN has invited 20 landholders to develop a weed-control plan with an SGLN officer. For details, see www.sgl.n.net.au.

For further information on blackberry control, see <https://vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/>

DO YOU HAVE BLACKBERRY LEAF RUST? IF YES, WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

Do you have Blackberry Leaf Rust Fungus (*Phragmidium violaceum*) on your property?

This biocontrol has reduced the severity of infestations in Australia for more than 25 years by defoliating and reducing suckers and daughter plants.

Please remember that it's not a silver bullet but an opportunity to incorporate in your overall blackberry control plan.

These two pictures can help you identify blackberry leaf rust. Both are at different stages of their life cycle. The orange spores are urediniospores, or the summer spores, that cause defoliation. As winter progresses or high summer temperatures hit, the rust produces teliospores - overwintering spores. These are survival spores - the same fungus at a different stage.

The Weeds of National Significance Blackberry Control Manual outlines the best way to integrate blackberry leaf rust by leaving inaccessible areas untreated, allowing the rust population to build up, and treating accessible areas with chemical or physical control methods.

The VBT is frequently asked about acquiring blackberry leaf rust. While some organisations provide this service, the answer is, if you have suitable conditions, you will have it. There is no need to acquire the agent and spread yourself.

For more information on blackberry leaf rust or biocontrol in general, contact the VBT at vbt@vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au

VBT Backs Woodnook Project

The VBT has thrown its support behind the Woodnook project, coordinated by the Northern Yarra Landcare Network, Northern Yarra Weeds Action Group and the Dixons Creek Landcare Group. The project aims to improve the biodiversity of Dixons Creek, which has become increasingly weedy. This area is known as Manna Gum Riparian Forest and includes at least one rare species of plant, *Eucalyptus fulgens*.

The VBT will be a key partner in this initiative, which will utilise a relocatable fence to contain grazing goats as part of an integrated weed-control program. The goats will be closely monitored over one to two months during summer to ensure areas are not overgrazed. Once the goats are removed, the regrowth of weeds including blackberry will be treated with chemicals. This process will be repeated over five years, steadily moving the 500-metre fence downstream as each section is treated.

Melbourne Water will also partner the initiative via its Liveable Communities, Liveable Waterways Program. Private landholders adjacent to the project area will support the program by controlling their weeds including European blackberry. Extra care will be taken around vineyards, where chemical control will take place after harvest.



BLACKBERRY INFESTED MANNA GUM RIPARIAN FOREST SOURCE: ROB FALLON



Using blackberry control chemicals safely



OFF-TARGET SPRAY DAMAGE

If using chemicals as part of your blackberry control program, you need to ensure safe usage. For example, using appropriate application techniques or a less volatile chemical.

A recent VBT “Need Ideas” article - <https://vicblackberrytaskforce.com.au/planning-for-success/> - stated mapping areas of concern should be part of your blackberry control plan. This could be a waterway, sensitive crop, or native vegetation.

Waterways can be particularly sensitive to chemicals, particularly to instream biota. A blackberry control chemical is registered for use in and around waterways, but it is non-selective, meaning the user must be careful not to overspray and inadvertently damage or kill other vegetation such as native grasses.

Sensitive crops and native vegetation need to be protected and serious consideration needs to be given to the type of chemical used and the application technique. There have been instances where chemicals have drifted and damaged nearby crops. The use of aerial spraying in these areas, such as via a helicopter, would be inappropriate. In this situation other techniques may be more appropriate, such as ground spraying, the cut and paint technique or non-chemical options.

For specific advice on what chemical to use, contact your chemical supplier and seek advice for your situation. Please be aware that some chemicals require an Agricultural Chemical User Permit. For more information on chemical control use, contact Agriculture Victoria on 136 186.

CONTROLLING BLACKBERRY IN URBAN/PERI-URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce receives many inquiries from landowners living in urban/peri-urban environments. Because landholders live close to each other, blackberry control options may differ compared with landholders in rural environments. Some controls are the same regardless of location. For example, the best time to apply herbicide is when the plant is actively growing - from November to March/April.

Inquiries often focus on chemical control and neighbouring blackberry infestations.

Where can I purchase chemicals to treat blackberries?

Herbicides can be purchased from a farming supplies or hardware outlet, where you can also get advice on selecting the right product, directions for use, how to apply the chemical safely and effectively, and the appropriate PPE needed.

Explain your situation so that the chemical supplier can tailor advice to your circumstances. You may live next door to a sensitive crop, waterway or somebody's prized roses.

Application of herbicide

The best method of herbicide application for small infestations is a pressure-powered spray unit, which can treat blackberries to a height of 1.5 metres. Following physical control measures, the best time to apply herbicide is when the regrowth is at least one metre tall, ensuring there is enough leaf coverage for the uptake of chemicals.

Physical control

Physical control is an important tool in urban/peri-urban environments. This is a great way to mitigate the risks of off-target chemical damage.

• Cut and paint

The cut and paint method involves cutting blackberry canes close to ground level and immediately painting the cut stems with herbicide. This treatment should only be used on small plants and will likely need to be repeated.



BLACKBERRY CONTROL - AN ISSUE IN URBAN & PERI-URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

• Hand weeding

This method is only effective with very small infestations. Although seedlings and small plants are sometimes difficult to pull out by hand, it is important that the entire root system is removed using a shovel or pick. Blackberry will regrow from any root fragments left in the soil.

• Slashing

Although cutting blackberry plants at ground level will not kill them, slashing can help in follow-up control by other methods. Fortnightly or monthly slashing or mowing forces the plant to regrow, using up root reserves and eventually making the plant weaker.

My neighbour has blackberry and won't do anything about it. Who can I contact?

If you would like to discuss the sighting of blackberry on private property or government land, contact Agriculture Victoria on 136 186 to speak to a local Biosecurity Officer.



CONTACT

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