

Pest Management



FIREWEED SEEDLING



FIREWEED FLOWER



FIREWEED PAPPUS

FIREWEED

Scientific Name: *Senecio madagascariensis*

Fireweed is a Weed of National Significance (WONS) and is a **Category three** restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*.

A person must not release these invasive plants into the environment, give away or sell as a seed, plant or anything infested with its seeds.

The *Biosecurity Act 2014* requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks associated with invasive plants under their control. This is called a General Biosecurity Obligation (GBO).

Further reading

- [Fireweed \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](http://daf.qld.gov.au)
- [Fireweed | Business Queensland](#)
- [Fireweed, Madagascar Ragwort, Madagascar Groundsel - Weeds Australia](#)
- [NSW WeedWise](#)

General information

Fireweed is an annual or short-lived perennial plant which grows in most soil types and thrives in overgrazed pastures, disturbed or cultivated soil. It is a multi-branched daisy-like herb up to 50cm tall and has dark green leaves with a serrated edge.

Each plant can produce up to 100 bright yellow flowers - each up to 2cm in diameter with 13-15 petals. A single plant can produce over 10,000 seeds during the growing season and can remain viable in the ground for over 10 years. Each seed has a silky pappus which catches in the wind and rows of very fine short hairs that attach to animals, clothing, vehicles and machinery

The seeds germinate in mild, warm conditions (15-27 degrees) in the presence of light and moisture, growing quickly between March and June and producing flowers in 6-10 weeks. Although fireweed plants mostly die back in spring, some do continue to flower and produce seed if in favourable growing positions.

At risk in the Lockyer Valley region

- Livestock production
- Hay and fodder production
- Native areas and habitats
- Value of land assets



How it spreads

- Mostly by wind, in contaminated pasture seed, hay, turf and mulch
- Sometimes seed attaches to animals, clothing, vehicles and machinery.

Its impacts

- Quickly dominates pasture, particularly after overgrazing or soil disturbance
- Both the fresh and dry forms of fireweed are toxic to livestock, particularly cattle and horses, causing illness, slow growth and poor conditioning. Irreversible liver damage may cause death within 3-6 months
- Though sheep and goats can graze on fireweed for at least one season, it can taint their milk - therefore goats for milk production should not graze fireweed-infested paddocks
- Degrades natural areas, reducing habitat for native fauna
- Decreases the value of land assets.

THE CONTROL OPTIONS

The General Biosecurity Obligation requires a person to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risk of spreading fireweed seed and the establishment of new infestations.

What do I need to do?

- Learn how to recognise fireweed when it is young, before it flowers and sets seed, so early action can be taken. Even light infestations of fireweed can produce one million seeds per hectare.

For small, isolated infestations

- Act immediately to prevent the infestation becoming worse
- Wear gloves to protect the skin from the plant's toxin, chip out or hand pull the weed then immediately place it in a doubled garbage bag
- Dispose at waste facility, burn or bury to a depth that does not allow re-establishment. (*Biosecurity Regulation 2016 Part 3, Subdivision 1, Section 11*)
- Manage animal grazing rate and maintain a dense cover of pasture – especially in autumn and winter.

For larger scattered infestations

- Spot spray the weed and surrounding soil preferably with residual herbicide, as per label or permit directions, then follow up with spot spraying, or manual removal of missed plants
- Manage animal grazing rate and maintain a dense cover of pasture – especially in autumn and winter
- Consider grazing of sheep or goats as a management tool but avoid grazing in late spring to reduce overwintering of fireweed.

For larger dense infestations

- Boom spray the weed and surrounding soil preferably with residual herbicide, as per label or permit directions, then follow up with spot spraying, or manual removal of missed plants
- Manage animal grazing rate and maintain a dense cover of pasture – especially in autumn and winter
- Consider grazing of sheep or goats as a management tool but avoid grazing in late spring to reduce overwintering of fireweed
- Carefully slash or mulch every six weeks before late spring, if less than 25% of the fireweed is flowering.