

NURSERY PAPERS

NOVEMBER 2006 Issue no.11

Weeds and the nursery industry

The way we deal with invasive plants (or 'weeds') in Australia is becoming increasingly important. The nursery industry plays an active role in this battle, particularly in addressing the distribution, planting and control of species that may be damaging to the environment and agriculture. What does your nursery business need to know about invasive garden plants? What can you do and where do you go for more information?

In this month's nursery paper, Robert Chin explores this often complicated issue and explains why, as an industry, we need to be working with the appropriate authorities.



Weeds and the nursery industry

Australians are becoming increasingly aware of weeds as an environmental issue. The nursery industry is often accused of being the source of many 'weedy' plants; there are even special terms for these plants, such as 'garden escapes', 'garden thugs', 'pest plants', 'alien invaders' and 'environmental weeds'. Government legislation has started to reflect this and a lot of effort is being put into controlling this expanding problem. This is a significant issue for our industry and has the potential to become even bigger.

Regulation and legislation relating to weeds in Australia

In Australia, weeds are regulated at a national, state, local government and catchment management area level. There are also several land management and regional management groups that are concerned with weeds. The difficulty for industry is knowing who is the responsible authority and which concerns we should respond to.

National level regulation

At a federal level there are a variety of things going on. Three main areas of interest are Australian Quarantine & Inspection Service (AQIS), the National Weeds Strategy (NWS) and Weeds of National Significance (WoNS).



The nursery industry is often identified as being the source of weedy plants such as vinca – there are even special terms for these plants such as 'garden escapees'.

AQIS and Biosecurity Australia

Australian quarantine legislation contains a list of plants that are allowed to be imported into Australia. All other plants are prohibited unless AQIS is satisfied that they are unlikely to become weeds of agriculture or the natural environment. This is known as 'the exclusion by exemption model'. However, this can delay or even prohibit the importation of new or existing plant varieties into Australia. AQIS work in conjunction with BioSecurity Australia to help protect at a national border level.

Australian Weeds Committee

The federal government set up the Australian Weeds Committee (AWC) to reduce the detrimental impact of weeds on the economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability of Australia's productive capacity and natural ecosystems. The purpose of the AWC is to provide an intergovernmental mechanism for identification and resolution of weed issues at a national level. As part of their work the AWC developed the National Weeds Strategy (NWS).

The NWS takes a strategic approach to weed management problems of national significance. It addresses both environmental and agricultural weeds. The NWS describes the nature of the problem, discusses why existing weed management measures are not adequate and lists the roles and responsibilities of government, community, landowners and land users.

Its three main goals are:

- Prevention of the development of new weed problems
- Reduction of the impact of existing weed problems of national significance
- Provision of the framework and capacity for ongoing management of weed problems of national significance.

Weeds of National Significance (WONS)

One of the first major outcomes of the AWC was to establish a list of Australia's potentially most serious weeds – Weeds of National Significance (WoNS). The list identifies those species that are in the early stages of establishment and if not managed, have the potential to become a significant threat to biodiversity and agriculture. The weeds on this list have now been declared in all Australian states and territories.

Table 1: Weeds of National Significance

Common Name	Botanical name
Alligator weed	<i>Alternanthera philoxeroides</i>
Athel pine	<i>Tamarix aphylla</i>
Bitou bush / boneseed	<i>Chrysanthemoides monilifera</i>
Blackberry	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.
Bridal creeper	<i>Asparagus asparagoides</i>
Cabomba	<i>Cabomba caroliniana</i>
Chilean needle grass	<i>Nassella neesiana</i>
Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>
Hymenachne	<i>Hymenachne amplexicaulis</i>
Lantana	<i>Lantana camara</i>
Mesquite	<i>Prosopis</i> spp.
Mimosa	<i>Mimosa pigra</i>
Parkinsonia	<i>Parkinsonia aculeata</i>
Parthenium weed	<i>Parthenium hysterophorus</i>
Pond apple	<i>Annona glabra</i>
Prickly acacia	<i>Acacia nilotica</i> ssp. <i>indica</i>
Rubber vine	<i>Cryptostegia grandiflora</i>
Salvinia	<i>Salvinia molesta</i>
Serrated tussock	<i>Nassella trichotoma</i>
Willows except weeping willows, pussy willow and sterile pussy willow	<i>Salix</i> spp. except <i>S. babylonica</i> , <i>S. X calodendron</i> and <i>S. X reichardtiji</i>



The industry can play an important role in increasing community awareness and understanding of the NGIA Invasive Plants Policy Position.

State level regulation

The majority of laws, regulations and restrictions on plant sales faced by industry are those implemented by the states. This is, of course, at the heart of one of the difficulties for our industry - growers sell plants in states other than where they are based and retailers buy plants from a variety of locations. Who is responsible if something goes wrong and a retailer sells a plant that is illegal in their state but not in the state where it was grown? As laws can change with little notice, you need to be aware of the regulations in all areas where you do business.

Further complicating matters is the fact that most states identify various levels of 'weediness' by region. A plant that is legal in one part of the state may not be legal in another.

It is not within the capacity of this nursery paper to list the different rules and laws that cover your business. Information for each state varies. The following table shows where information on weeds in your state (or a state to which you products) can be obtained.

Table 2: Weed Information in the States and Territories of Australia.

State	Responsible Authority	Phone	Weed Information
VIC	Department of Primary Industries, Victoria	136 186	www.dpi.vic.gov.au
S.A	Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation	(08) 8463 6800	www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au
W.A	Agriculture WA	(08) 9368 3333	www.agric.wa.gov.au
N.T	Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts	(08) 8999 2020	http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/naturalresources/weeds
QLD	Department of Natural Resources and Water	(07) 3896 3111	www.nrm.qld.gov.au/pests/weeds
NSW	NSW Department of Primary Industries	(02) 6391 3100	www.agric.nsw.gov.au/noxweed
ACT	Environment ACT	13 22 81	www.environment.act.gov.au
TAS	Department of Primary Industries and Water	1300 368 550	www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au

A full list of these sites and weed lists are available on the NGIA website www.ngia.com.au.

The role of the industry

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) and the various state Nursery & Garden Industry Associations (NGIs) around Australia have been working with governments for some time on invasive plants and how we can control the distribution and sale of pest plants. The nursery industry as a whole would like to be considered as one of the most environmentally responsible industries in Australia. However, to do this, we need to successfully address issues such as invasive plants. As part of our commitment to the environment and the battle against invasive plants, NGIA has developed an Invasive Plants Policy Position.

Its aims are:

- A fairer approach to the invasive plant issue
- A set of agreed lists used at each level to identify invasive plants
- One consistent, reliable and independent weed risk assessment process used at all levels

- Recognition of the industry's initiatives and role in managing environmental issues such as invasive plants
- A commitment by government to industry based communications and awareness programs when targeting our businesses and consumers
- A secure and sustainable future for our business.

In addition, NGIA and various NGIs are working hard to position the industry as part of the solution to the invasive plants problem and to highlight the important role nursery businesses can play in increasing community awareness and understanding of the issues.

We need to successfully address issues such as invasive plants

Local government

Many local governments have an increasing interest in weeds. Most have lists of plants that they consider 'weedy' or potentially invasive in their municipality. Although some of those lists have legal standing, the majority do not and are put together as education and awareness tools only. In using local government lists it is important to clarify the legal status of the plants within them and also the source of the information used to create the list. In some states local government has a responsibility in enforcing state noxious or declared weeds legislation.

It is worth considering identifying and/or removing from sale plants causing the most problems in your local area.



NGIA's Invasive Plants Policy Position has been developed as part of our commitment to the environment and the battle against invasive plants.

What can you do?

How can you help and how can you stay out of trouble? By being aware of your responsibilities. Here are some points worth considering:

- Know what plants are illegal in your state and stop growing or selling them
- Know what plants are on various 'hit lists' or local council recommendations, stop selling them and proactively offer customers low invasive alternatives.
- Keep up-to-date with information on invasive plants from various sources including your industry body
- Read NGIA's Invasive Plants Policy Position, available to download at http://www.ngia.com.au/publication_resources/overview.asp.

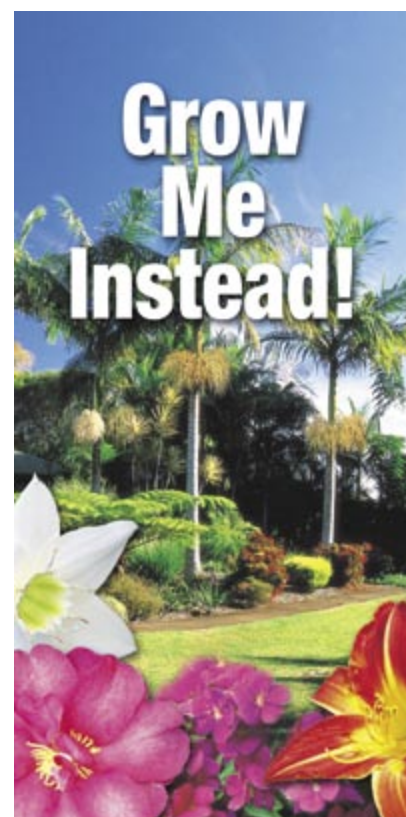
Keep up-to-date with information on invasive plants from various sources including your industry body

Make money from invasive plants

Plant buyers (both consumers and commercial buyers) are already concerned about weedy plants. The good thing is that most nursery businesses are taking this into consideration and have stopped selling these plants or are removing them from sale. It can be difficult, though, as some of these plants are still popular.

As an industry, we need to be proactive and turn this into a positive. Many of the plants that are considered weedy are lines that are easy to propagate and are typically low value lines - they are readily available at Sunday markets and backyard nurseries because they are easy to grow.

- Replace 'weedy' plants with non-invasive alternatives that have similar garden desirable traits but higher profit margins.
- Promote your business as environmentally responsible and promote your plants as ones that will not take over the garden or escape into bushland and farms.



The bottom line

Weeds are a significant problem for the Australian environment and will continue to be one. The nursery industry is playing a responsible part in this process but is doing so in a way that attempts to minimise the financial impacts on our members.

The 'Grow me Instead' project targeting the greater Sydney basin helps to identify suitable alternatives to invasive plants. Selling alternative species with similar traits but higher profit margins is one of the ways the industry can benefit directly from being environmentally responsible.

More information

Some useful references include:

- Nursery & Garden Industry (NGI) website www.ngia.com.au
- Australian Quarantine & Inspection Service (AQIS) has information on what plants can be bought into Australia. www.affa.gov.au/aqis
- The Australian Weeds Committee has a comprehensive resource available on the web: www.weeds.org.au
- The Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weeds Management (Weeds CRC) does a lot of work in this area. Their outputs are not always friendly to the nursery industry but they are a key player: www.weeds.crc.org.au
- Chin, R. 2005. Nursery People are not all environmental pests. Weed Society Victoria Conference 2005 - Proceedings.

Acknowledgements

This *Nursery Paper* was written by Robert Chin, Industry Development Officer for Nursery & Garden Industry Victoria (NGIV).