

Cradle Coast Regional Priority Weeds **Fact Sheet**

Red Inkweed

Invasive
Environmental
Weed



Red Inkweed

Phytolacca octandra

Images: King Island Landcare



Red Inkweed is an invasive hairless woody shrub growing up to 2 m high with a deep taproot. Stems are smooth, often tinged with reddish-purple. Leaves are soft, oval to egg-shaped, bright green, sometimes turning reddish with age. Flowers Nov - May. Flowers are small, greenish-white which grow in dense, erect spikes 7-15 cm long that turn purplish and its berries turn from green to red, then dark purplish-black when ripe. It is a short-lived plant, surviving 2-3 years. Seeds can be viable in the soil for up to 40 years.

Removing Red Inkweed

Red inkweed often **requires re-treatment for 2-3 years** after initial control because seeds in the soil can germinate later.

By hand

Small plants can be hand-pulled, but larger plants require a digging tool to completely remove the large taproot to prevent re-growth. Leave waste on site if no fruit is present and the root is fully removed from soil contact. **As all parts are toxic, always wear protective clothing when handling plants.**

Cut and swab

Best done when plant is actively growing **spring - autumn**.

Larger plants can be treated with the cut and swab method. Cut the stems as close to the ground as possible and then swab the wound with herbicide within 15 to 30 seconds, using a shoe polish bottle applicator (50% 'frog-friendly' glyphosate, 50% water) or similar. These bottles are available from Cradle Coast NRM and Landcare Tasmania.

For mature plants, a cut-and-swab approach is usually more reliable.

Impacts

Red Inkweed is not yet common in Tasmania but is becoming an emerging problem in several locations, including on King Island and around Burnie.

Red Inkweed is a fast-maturing, competitive pioneer plant that can quickly colonise disturbed ground, outcompete native species and dominate areas, including along waterways.

While not usually eaten by livestock, it is poisonous, and there are known cases of animals being poisoned. All parts of the plant, especially the root, are toxic; the sap can also cause skin irritation. Commonly found in disturbed sites, waste places, roadsides, forest margins, and stream banks.

How does it spread?

Seeds are spread primarily by birds, water, on equipment and machinery.

Removing Red Inkweed (continued)

Foliar spraying

Spraying is effective on established plants and larger infestations. Spray **actively growing plants**, ideally **in spring – autumn**. Use a non-toxic penetrant and marking dye. Spray thoroughly and carefully on foliage until leaves are wet but not dripping.

Legal and Safety

Always read the herbicide label and safety data information and follow all directions on use.

Weed Hygiene

Effective weed hygiene practices help prevent the spread of invasive weeds and protect both people and the environment during control activities.

- **Wear appropriate personal protective equipment**, Inkweed is toxic. including gloves, eye protection, long sleeves, and enclosed footwear. For herbicide spraying, a respirator is most important.
- **Minimise soil disturbance** to reduce the chance of buried weed seeds germinating.
- **Control outliers first** before tackling the main infestation.
- **Dispose of plant material responsibly**, (double bagging) ensuring that seeds or viable plant parts are not spread during transport or disposal.

More information

Visit **Weeds Australia** website www.weeds.org.au/, or contact your local **Council NRM Officer, Cradle Coast NRM or King Island Landcare** for advice on identification and best-practice control methods in your area.