

# PATERSON'S CURSE & VIPER'S BUGLOSS

(*Echium plantagineum* & *Echium vulgare*)

*Why are Paterson's curse & viper's bugloss weeds?*

- Invade pasture, river beds, roadsides and other waste ground
- Invade grasslands and grassy woodlands
- Adapt well to poor, shallow soils and reduced soil fertility
- Seed prolifically
- Are usually avoided by stock, hence they often become dominant in grazed pasture and reduce carrying capacity
- Leaves are toxic to stock (Paterson's curse is especially toxic to horses. Toxicity increases during flowering and seeding)
- Hairs cause irritation in livestock and humans

*Description*

**Paterson's curse:**

**Plant:** annual, occasionally biennial, herb, flat rosette grows multiple flowering stems to 1m high, on poor soils may be single stemmed, hairy stems and a hardy taproot

**Leaves:** the leaves of the rosette are oval or lanceolate (far longer than they are wide and tapering to wards the tip), hairy and have branched veins, leaves on stems become smaller towards flowerheads

**Seeds:** wrinkled, brownish

**Flowers:** from late winter to early summer (can flower throughout year), large, tubular, blue-purple, to 3cm long with two of the five stamens, (antenna like protrusions) extending from the flower

**Viper's bugloss:**

**Plant:** biennial or perennial herb, flat rosette grows single flowering stem to 1m high, occasionally adopts branching habit, covered with coarse prickly hairs, hardy taproot

**Leaves:** rosette leaves much narrower than in Paterson's curse, hairy, longitudinal veins are unbranched

**Seeds:** multiple, tiny, pepper like seeds from each flower

**Flowers:** large, tubular, blue-purple with four of the five stamens protrudings

*Dispersal via*

- Was initially spread via seed in contaminated hay
- Further spread via livestock (seeds stick to coat and/or carried internally) and humans (i.e. in mud on vehicles)
- In water
- spread on vehicles used for slashing the plant on roadsides

Phil Hansen



Weed: Paterson's curse

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: Paterson's curse  
Note the 2 protruding stamen

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: Paterson's curse rosette

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: viper's bugloss

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: viper's bugloss  
Note the 4 protruding stamen

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Weed: viper's bugloss rosette

### Status

Both Paterson's curse and viper's bugloss are listed as class 4 noxious weeds in all council areas within the Molonglo Catchment. The growth and spread of the plants must be controlled in accordance with local management plans published by each local council.

In the ACT, Paterson's curse and viper's bugloss are class 3 pest plants which must be contained.

### Look-alikes

Native plants can often be confused with weed species. The following information aims to assist you with accurate identification to prevent the loss of our declining natives. If you are unsure what species you are dealing with, take advantage of the identification services on offer from your local weeds officer (either at your local council or the ACT's Parks, Conservation and Lands) before carrying out any controls.

**Variable plantain** (*Plantago varia*) has similar rosettes however flowers are dissimilar. Note the tooth on the edge of the leaves.



Native: variable plantain

### Control methods

Molonglo Catchment Weed Control Calendar. Maintain groundcover to prevent dense infestations occurring and avoid buying feed from areas known to be affected by these weeds. On high production pastures, cultivate and establish a dense sward of grasses and clovers that will out-compete the weeds. Over-grazing will encourage the spread of this unpalatable weed by reducing pasture vigour.

Hand dig small infestations or spray. Seek advice on chemical application from your Council Weeds Officer or local 'bush friendly' nursery. Always use chemicals as directed on the label.

Slashing the weeds can be highly effective in reducing the vigour of the plants however timing is critical. Due to the persistent nature of this weed it is advised that you contact your local weeds officer for detailed control advice.

A number of biological controls have been released in NSW. Most are available and easy to rear and have been recorded to have a good impact on Paterson's curse. Contact the Molonglo Catchment Coordinator for information on how to access these biological controls.