

AFRICAN BOXTHORN

(Lycium ferocissimum)

Les Tanner - www.northwestweeds.nsw.gov.au



Weed: African boxthorn

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



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Why is African boxthorn a weed?

- Provides shelter for feral animals
- Restricts stock and human access (originally promoted, sold and used as a boundary fence between properties)
- Hardy, fast growing and drought resistant
- Often grows under paddock trees, taking up often limited shaded areas used by stock (seeds are dropped from above by birds)
- Sharp thorny spines are a risk to eyes of stock, especially during dry times when the animals are chasing feed under plants
- Out-competes native species

Description

Plant: a large intricately branched shrub (to 5m high, 3m across but usually only 2-3m high), with long sharp spines (to 15cm long)

Leaves: small, bright green, smooth and slightly fleshy up to 3.5cm long

Flowers: small white with purple markings

Fruit: red, tomato-like, but only 1cm in diameter

Dispersal via

- Birds are very effective and responsible for dense infestations under trees, fences and powerlines
- Foxes and other small mammals also eat the berries and distribute them in their droppings
- Root suckers where plants are dug out but the whole root system is not removed

Status

African boxthorn is listed as a class 4 noxious weed in all council areas within the Molonglo Catchment. The growth and spread of the plant must be controlled in accordance with local management plans published by each local council.

In the ACT, African boxthorn is a class 2 and 4 Pest Plant which must be suppressed and whose supply is prohibited.

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.

Three native spiny shrubs may be confused with boxthorn: **tree violet** or **gruggly bush** (*Hymenanthera dentata*); **blackthorn** (*Bursaria spinosa*) and **anchor plant** (*Discaria pubescens*).

Tree violet or gruggly bush has sparse toothed leaves and the flowers are tiny yellow bells which hang along the underside of the branches, followed by purple-black or white berries. On the tablelands this plant is a shrub to about 1m high, frequently festooned with lichen and often grows among rocks. Its spines are alternate.

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Native: tree violet or gruggly bush

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Native: tree violet or gruggly bush

Blackthorn: a widespread shrub to about 5 metres high with small white flowers produced in large clusters at the end of the branches in summer, followed by brown papery seed capsules.

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Native: blackthorn

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Native: blackthorn

Anchor plant grows 30cm to 1.5m high and has paired spines about 5cm long and no leaves, except in spring, when it also produces clusters of white flowers at the base of the spines.

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Native: anchor plant

Control methods

For advice on what time of year to implement the following management options, see the Molonglo Catchment Weed Control Calendar.

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

Hand-pull African boxthorn seedlings.

Cut and paint or spray. Seedlings are likely after removal of adult plants, and suckers may arise from the roots and will need follow-up work. Sprayed plants may leaf up again several times before finally dying.

Replace removed vegetation with native species to provide habitat to native animals that may have been affected by the weed removal and to assist in reducing the return of the weed.