

## Whittlesea weed fact sheet – Paterson’s curse (*Echium plantagineum*)

Declared noxious weed regionally controlled in Port Phillip East

### Issue

Paterson’s curse is a well known weed that is disliked by landowners throughout Australia, both in rural and urban areas. With the ability to produce multiple generations of plants every season, Paterson’s curse can rapidly dominate pastures, lawns and bushland areas.

Although Paterson’s curse has a spectacular purple flower which is considered a wildflower in the Mediterranean, it is a significant weedy pest in Australia. In Victoria it was not a major weed until the 1983-4 drought when large amounts of fodder and livestock were moved about the State, as well as interstate.

Known as salvation Jane in South Australia, most landowners view the presence of this weed as a significant threat to the health of their livestock as it is known to be poisonous. Today, Paterson’s curse has become a common weed which has substantial environmental and economic impacts.

### Local scene

Locally known as ‘patto’, Paterson’s curse can be found growing on many farms and adjoining roadsides in the southern rural zone of the municipality. Paterson’s curse is also a common weed in recently developed areas where there has been significant ground disturbance. It has particularly flourished on the fertile dark clays, although it is not entirely restricted to this soil type.

Within the City of Whittlesea, Paterson’s curse is commonly found in:

- Bundoora
- Epping
- Doreen
- Mernda
- Mill Park
- South Morang
- Woodstock
- Wollert

**Council Offices**  
25 Ferres Boulevard  
South Morang VIC 3752  
Locked Bag 1  
Bundoora MDC VIC 3083

**Tel** 03 9217 2170  
**Fax** 03 9217 2111  
**TTY** 133 677 (ask for 9217 2170)  
**Email** [info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au)  
[www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au)

 **Free Telephone Interpreter Service**

عربي	9679 9871	Hrvatski	9679 9872
廣東話	9679 9857	Ελληνικά	9679 9873
Italiano	9679 9874	Türkçe	9679 9877
Македонски	9679 9875	Việt-ngữ	9679 9878
普通话	9679 9876	Other	9679 9879

## Problem land management practices

Some land management practices contribute to the spread of weeds. Landowners can unintentionally spread Paterson's curse by:

- Slashing, especially during the peak flowering/seeding season
- Importing soil or fill that is contaminated with weed seed
- Disturbing soil where weed infestations may have grown in previous years
- Using dirty machinery that is contaminated with soil and weedy material
- Purchasing fodder/hay that contains weed seeds
- Importing livestock carrying seeds within their stomachs

Selecting the most suitable control technique is crucial. Integrating a number of weed control techniques is often more effective in the longer term. The most important part of any weed management program is to maintain control and prevent re-infestation. Re-planting the treated area with desirable plants and regular monitoring is essential to prevent re-infestation.

Refer to the City's 'Seasonal Guide to Weed Management' for more information on integrated weed control options. Visit [www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au) (key word search: seasonal guide) or email [Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au) for your copy of the Guide.

Please contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer on (03) 9217 2493 for further advice or for a copy of the Guide.

## Identification tips

Paterson's curse can easily be identified during all growing stages, however is most noticeable when in full flower. To find this weed, you will need to become familiar with a few key identification features described below.

**Flower:** Vivid purple, trumpet/tube shaped flower, approximately 3cm in length and width. It is not uncommon for the flowers to be white or light pink. The pollinating segments of the flower, called stamens, are long and thin, two of which protrude from the flower. Peak flowering period is during mid-spring through to early summer, however plants can flower throughout the year subject to rainfall.

**Seed:** Small, heart-shaped seeds are approximately 3mm wide and long, changing from green to dark brown, almost blackish on ripening. The surface of the seeds are covered in small bumps and there is a distinct seam down the centre of the seed. The bumps on the seeds assist its dispersal by attaching it to a host, i.e. machinery, animal fur or amongst rock or soil. Seeds are normally held in groups of 4. Plants start flowering at the base of the

flower spike/stem and continue producing flowers upwards towards the flower stem tip. This often means there are mature seeds already present when the plants are in full bloom and most noticeable.

**Leaves:** Mid-green, oval to lance-shaped leaves which are covered in tiny irritating bristles and deeply veined. Leaves vary in size depending on the age of the plant and the conditions in which the plant is growing. In optimum conditions, leaves can reach up to 30cm in length. The thin small leaves growing along the flowering stems are often more lance-shaped than oblong, however they still maintain the distinct veining and bristles.

**Form:** Commencing growth as 2 tiny leaves, each plant gradually forms a ground hugging round cluster of leaves, often referred to as a rosette. As the plants mature, they develop upright branched stems reaching up to 1.5m tall in optimum conditions, where moisture availability is high. However, plants are more commonly 30cm tall when in full bloom. Where conditions are harsh, i.e. low rainfall or poor soils, Paterson's curse will still grow and flower, however the plants are often substantially smaller i.e. 10cm tall. After flowering, the plant gradually dies and the stems turn black, often appearing to have been burnt.

Accurate identification is essential. If you are not sure whether you have this weed on your property, contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer for further advice on (03) 9217 2493 or email [Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au).

## Contacts

Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) [www.apvma.gov.au](http://www.apvma.gov.au) Tel. (02) 6272 5852

City of Whittlesea Sustainability Planning Unit [www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au) Tel. (03) 9217 2493

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) Tel. 136 186

DPI Chemical Information Service [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) Tel. (03) 9210 9379

## Further reading

Department of Primary Industries, Frankston- Morely & Faithfull (October 2004) Landcare Notes: Paterson's Curse Identification LC0173

Department of Primary Industries, Frankston- McLaren & Faithfull (October 2004) Landcare Notes: Paterson's Curse Management LC0383

CSIRO Publishing (2001) Parsons & Cuthbertson Noxious Weeds of Australia - Second Edition.

## **Disclaimer**

The advice contained in this publication is intended as a source of information only. Always use chemicals in accordance with manufacturer directions on the product label or in Material Safety data sheets available from the manufacturer. The City of Whittlesea and its officers do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from your relying on this information.