

# Sweet Briar

Department of Primary Industries

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## Common and Scientific Names

Sweet briar, Briar rose, Wild rose.

*Rosa rubiginosa* L.

## Origin and distribution

Sweet briar is native to Europe and western Asia and northern India. Sweet briar was first recorded in Victoria in the 1850s and had established over large areas by 1917. It is now widespread in a variety of cooler, higher rainfall habitats including farmland, woodlands, and stony rises of the volcanic plains, along roadsides and in other disturbed areas.

Sweet briar establishes in areas of moderate soil fertility where there are low levels of grazing. It reproduces from seed and perennial roots and suckers readily from the crown.

## Description

Sweet briar is a perennial woody shrub up to 3m tall.

**Stems** - usually many (and can be up to several hundred) stems arising from the rootstock; erect or scrambling, up to 3 metres high, green and smooth to brown and somewhat roughened, woody, branched, spreading and sometimes trailing, heavily covered with down-curved prickles up to 1.5 cm long.

**Leaves** - green, consisting of 5 or 7 shortly stalked leaflets, arranged in two or three pairs with a single leaflet at the end of the leaf. Leaflets ovate, 10 to 40 mm long and 5 to 20 mm wide, the base and apex are rounded, the terminal leaflet is usually the largest, margins serrate, with minute scent glands on underside emitting aromatic odour. The leaves have stem-clasping flanges at the base which cradle the leaf stalk.

**Flowers** - pink or white, 2.5 - 4 cm diameter, on short prickly stalks, occurring in loose clusters at the ends of stems or branches. Each flower has 5 petals, 8 to 25 mm long, numerous yellowish stamens and five elongated spiny sepals prominent at the base.

**Fruit** - commonly referred to as a 'hip'. A smooth or hairy and bristly, egg-shaped capsule, 15 to 20 mm long. When ripe the hips are orange to red to almost black. The sepals often remain attached to the top of the hip. The hips are shed in Autumn after leaf fall.

**Seeds** - yellow, 4 to 7 mm long and irregularly shaped.

**Roots** - stout, shallow and extensively spreading.



*Figure 1. Sweet briar.*



*Figure 2. Sweet briar flower.*

## The problem

Infestations can rapidly take over woodland areas. Patches of the weed can impede the movement of grazing animals and cause serious mechanical injury to stock and dogs. Sweet briar provides harbour for rabbits and other pest animals.

Although a non desirable species, Sweet briar has some favourable characteristics. The hips are a rich source of vitamin C and can be eaten raw. They are used in wines, sauces and jellies. Sweet briar is of some value to apiarists as a source of pollen.

The plant has little or no value as fodder for stock.

## Similar species

The only other truly naturalised rose plant in Victoria is

**Weeds cost Victorian Agriculture \$900 million per year.  
How much do they cost you?**

Dog rose - *Rosa canina* L. It can be distinguished from Sweet briar in that it has flower stalks without prickles and the apex of each leaflet is acutely pointed.

### Flowering period

Flowers of Sweet briar usually appear October to December.

### Life cycle and reproduction

Seed production is prolific.

### Dispersal

Sweet briar was originally planted widely as an ornamental or hedge plant. Seeds are the only means of dispersal and are most likely to be spread by birds and foxes which eat the fruit and void viable seed. Some spread is probably caused by movement of hips and seed in water.

Sweet briar is a rapid spreader where there is little competition or only light grazing pressure.

### Management program

***Some control methods described in this note are only effective if used in combination with other control options as part of a long-term management program.***

***If used in isolation, these methods do not effectively destroy the plant, allowing it to re-shoot or continue to grow. Authorised officers from DPI or DSE may direct landowners to undertake specific control activities to ensure methods are used that are capable of destroying plants and preventing their spread.***

***Where directed to do so, landowners must use the method or methods as directed by the authorised officer. In most cases the landowner will be able to choose from a variety of options appropriate for use in their particular situation.***

#### General approach

Priorities for controlling different infestations must be developed when planning a Sweet briar Management Program. The integration of a number of appropriate techniques is likely to give the best long-term results. Clean areas should be managed to keep them free of the weed. Lightly infested areas should be treated as a priority to minimise further spread and heavily infested areas should be tackled progressively as part of a property management strategy.

#### Vegetative cover

Dense cover restricts the establishment of seedlings.

### Specific actions

#### Removal

Established plants can be removed by grubbing, tractor pulling, bulldozing or ripping.

Cutting or slashing is not as effective as regrowth will occur from crowns and rootstock which will need follow-up control.

#### Cultivation

Areas of infestation on agricultural land should be ploughed deeply, after mechanical removal of larger bushes, to expose roots for raking and burning. Follow up with further cultivation and pasture improvement or the planting of a crop. Good pasture management and/or repeated cultivation after cropping is essential for best results.

#### Grazing

Pasture must have grazing pressure applied whenever seedlings appear. Sheep and goats will destroy seedlings successfully. Goats will strip and control mature plants over time, however fencing to contain goats must be of a high standard.

#### Chemical control

Chemical (herbicide) treatment can be a key part of a Sweet briar integrated control plan, however it is not desirable to have chemical treatment as the only control activity.

Some chemical products can be used to foliage spray Sweet briar. Others can be used in basal bark treatments, cut stump treatments or stem injection treatment or applied in shots under bushes.

The Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicine Authority (APVMA) is responsible for the assessment and registration of agricultural and veterinary chemicals in Australia. As chemical products are registered on a daily basis and renewal of these registrations is undertaken each financial year, there is change in the registration status of products each year. The APVMA information is available at: <http://www.apvma.gov.au/>

The Chemical Standards Branch (CSB) of the Department of Primary Industries provides information on agricultural chemicals registered in Victoria and their uses. Enquiries will be referred through the Customer Service Centre on 136 186. Information can also be obtained by visiting the CSB website: [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards)

***Under Victorian legislation there are controls on the use of agricultural chemicals. It is the responsibility of the user to be familiar with these controls. These responsibilities are outlined in Agriculture Note AG0520: "Responsible use and handling of farm chemicals".***

Farm chemicals are registered for specific uses. Each chemical has a 'product label', which documents the approved use and the approved rate of use within each State of Australia. This label is important in determining the appropriateness of chemical use.

***Choose only products registered for use on Sweet briar in your particular situation. Read the product***

**Weeds don't respect boundaries.  
If a weed is a problem on your property, it's a problem for your neighbours.**

**label carefully and follow all label instructions.**

Your chemical retailers can provide information on registered chemical products that are available in their store. They can also supply a 'Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS)' which outlines the health and safety issues associated with use of a product.

**Legal use of some restricted chemicals requires the user to possess an Agricultural Chemical User Permit (ACUP). Other chemicals have restrictions on their use in Agricultural Chemical Control Areas (ACCA's).**

Information on ACUP's, ACCA's and other chemical information can be found at the website:  
[www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards)

**Further advice**

- Contact your local Landcare or Friends group for further assistance and advice.
- Call the DPI/DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186.
- Contact your local DPI Pest Management Officer for advice on local programs.
- Visit the DPI website at:  
<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au>  
and the Weeds Australia website at:  
<http://www.weeds.org.au>

**References**

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**The advice contained in this publication is intended as a source of information only. Always read the label before using any of the products mentioned. The State of Victoria 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 you relying on any information in this publication.**

**All land managers have a responsibility to manage weeds on their property.**