

Himalayan blackberry

Description:

The Himalayan blackberry is the largest and possibly most invasive, non-native variety of blackberries in the Pacific Northwest. It was first introduced from Europe to the area as a crop plant in the 1800's. Since then, it has invaded large areas throughout the west coast.

It is a perennial plant that can reproduce from seed, root crowns, root pieces, and stem cuttings. A root crown is located at the base of a stem (cane) where nutrients are stored and numerous roots and shoots will emerge. Canes are green or green and red, stiff, angular, and have numerous large thorns. Canes have green leaves that are in groups of three or five, have jagged edges, and are round or oval shaped with a slightly pointed tip. In the second year of growth, a cane develops small white or whitish pink flower clusters that produce edible blackberries. The cane dies at the end of the second year although the plant will continue to live by producing new canes each year from root crowns.



Impacts:

Himalayan blackberry grows very rapidly and can cover and replace native habitat that is important for plant and animal diversity. Once established, it will out-compete native vegetation and cover more ground with each season. The fast growing thorny canes make removal difficult and often painful. The canes of Himalayan blackberry can grow ten feet tall and over twenty feet long in a single year.

Control Options:

Thurston County's integrated pest management emphasizes cultural, biological, and manual control methods to keep pests and vegetation problems low enough to prevent damage. When chemical control is considered, the least toxic product is recommended when no other control methods would be effective or practical.

► Cultural / Habitat

Himalayan blackberry does not grow well in areas that are well shaded. Planting an area with trees will help keep blackberry from getting established. If blackberry plants have been removed from an area it is important to remove seedlings as they appear and replant the area with native plant species.



► Manual / Mechanical

Blackberry plants can be effectively, but not easily, controlled using an approach that starts with cutting or mowing down canes and is followed by plant and root removal. Tractor mounted mowers, brush cutters, hedge trimmers, etc. can be used to cut down canes. Mowing can also provide the benefit of mulching and will make the site more accessible. A mattock (pick ax) and shovel can be effective in digging up root crowns located at the base of each cane (both ends of the cane can have roots if the cane tip touches the ground). After the site has been cleared the entire area should be monitored for blackberry seedlings. Mowing is easiest when the plant is shorter than 18 inches high and cutting of blackberry for control needs to be ongoing throughout the growing season (5 or more cuttings) and will require cutting year after year.

► Biological

Goats have been used to control small to modest sized infestations of blackberry and, once the mature plants have been removed, chickens have been used to help in the removal of seeds.

► Chemical

Chemical control combined with site clearing and replanting is the most effective way to remove blackberry. Canes can be cut down and removed in mid-summer to help with site access, emerging shoots and re-growth can be treated with an herbicide later in the season when it is most effective. An area that has had mature plant control will likely require follow-up control of seedlings, either by physical removal or further chemical control. Also, remember to replant the area with desirable native plants to prevent growth of another unwanted species.

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in many herbicides and is very effective in controlling blackberry. Thurston County rates glyphosate products high in hazard for carcinogenic potential. The risk from spot spraying blackberry is considered low provided that the applicator wears chemically resistant gloves, pants, and a long sleeved shirt. Because glyphosate is a systemic herbicide, it is absorbed and circulated to all plant parts and prevents the roots from producing new shoots. A 1% to 1.5% concentration of glyphosate is recommended for effective control. Glyphosate products are non-selective and will likely kill or cause chemical injury to any plant that is sprayed – shield or cover neighboring desirable plants to minimize the chance of unwanted injury.



Timing:

Hand removal of root systems is easiest when the ground is very wet (late fall through early spring) but, removal at any time of the year will be effective. Seedling control must be done in the year they appear, prior to flower and seed production – but follow up removal must be performed each year since the seeds can sprout several years after they are in the soil.

Chemical control of mature plants is most effective late in the season (September) when the plant has produced fruit but before the first killing frost. Late summer is when blackberry plants store nutrients in the root system, so systemic herbicides used at this time will also be sent to the roots and improve control.

Pollinator Protection:

To minimize negative impacts to bees and other pollinators, treatment prior to blooming is recommended. Removal of flowers before treating can be an option. If treatment must occur during blooming period, try to spray early or late in the day or on cloudy cool days.

READ AND FOLLOW ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS AND RESTRICTIONS. Obey all label precautions, safety measures, and wear all recommended personal protective equipment. Use of brand name does not connote endorsement and is for reference only; other products with the same active ingredients may be available under other names. Pesticide product registration is renewed annually and product names and formulations may vary from year to year.

REFERENCES:

Oregon State University. PNW Weed Management Handbook. PNW Weeds – Control of Problem Weeds; Introduction, beancaper to bursage. 2007. <http://pnwpest.org/pnw/weeds>
Bennett, Max. Oregon State University, Extension Service. Managing Himalayan Blackberry in Western Oregon Riparian Areas. EM 8894. Published; September 2006 and reprinted February 2007.
King County Noxious Weed Control Program. Best Management Practices: Evergreen blackberry (*Rubus laciniatus*) and Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor syn. Rubus armeniacus*). March 2005.



Thurston County Public Health & Social Services
412 Lilly Road NE
Olympia WA 98506
Phone: 360-867-2586
T.D.D. 360-867-2603
www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehipm/index.html