

Weed control Cat's claw creeper



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Bursting with colour

Every Spring, many of our forests will be bursting with colour from flowers of all different colours, shapes and sizes. But some forests will only see yellow, and lots of it.

The yellow is from the flower belonging to an exotic vine known as Cat's claw creeper (*Dolichandra unguis-cati*). Its name derives from the three-clawed tendrils which grow from its stems, each resembling a cat's claw which it uses to hook on and climb onto trees.

What is it?

Cat's claw creeper is an aggressive vine native to tropical America.

Its name derives from the three-clawed tendrils, each resembling a cat's claw, which the plant uses to hook onto and climb up host trees.

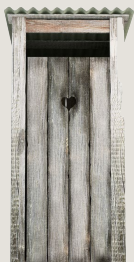
This spring/summer we are asking landholders to look out for the yellow-bell-shaped flower and get social!

Look out for:

- Its three clawed tendrils.
- Vine stems tightly attached to tree trunks.
- The numerous long, narrow, flattened seed pods produced during spring/summer after flowering.
- Woody stems with leaves that are glossy, dark green above and pale green underneath.



Cat's claw creeper has bright yellow flowers that appear every spring.



Cool toilets

Cat's claw creeper was originally introduced to Australia as an ornamental plant from South America.

Its bright yellow flowers, rapid growth and hardy nature made it attractive to gardeners and it was often used to keep outdoor toilets cool and shady!

Why is it a problem?

Unfortunately, once present, it can spread very quickly, climbing up and smothering trees and covering the forest floor much like a carpet.

Reproduces easily

It reproduces by producing numerous long, narrow, flattened seed pods that eventually split after flowering, releasing hundreds of winged seeds, easily dispersed via wind and water - up to 200 in each pod.

Resilient

Cat's claw creeper also grows tubers below the ground. These are hard to remove and allow the vine to regrow after it appears to have been eradicated from an area.

Suffocates native habitat

An infestation can kill a large, fully grown tree in less than five years, threatening native wildlife habitat, creek bank stability and local water quality.

Control methods

If left to grow, Cat's claw creeper commonly creeps up, smothers and can eventually kill trees.

The best method of control can depend on resources available, accessibility, how far the vine has spread and the type of landscape (e.g. flat vs. hilly).

It can be managed in a number of ways using:

- Physical
- Chemical and/or
- Biocontrol methods.

1. Getting physical

If you spot the flower and vine on your property, one of the easiest and cheapest ways (though time consuming) to temporarily control Cat's claw creeper is by cutting the stems of the vine.

Cut vines 1-2m above the ground, ideally before the flowers start to appear. Leave aerial sections to die. This stops flowering and/or seeding.

For a more permanent solution, please refer to the cut-stump method.

You can also dig up seedlings and pull out tubers from the soil to kill the plant. Dispose of them carefully and take care to minimise soil disturbance (some tubers can grow up to 40cm long!).



Cat's claw creeper also grows tubers below the ground.



*Cut vines about 1-2 m from the ground.
Photo: Noosa and District Landcare Group*



2. Chemical control

Spraying Cat's claw creeper with herbicide can be effective, providing herbicides are carefully chosen and selectively applied when plants are actively growing.

Herbicides can be used either as a foliar spray or via the cut-stump method.

Cut stump method

Step 1: Target vines - identify and cut stems just above ground level.

Step 2: Pull lower stems off tree, leaving aerial/ upper parts to die in the tree.

Step 3: Cut vine stems again close to the ground and immediately (within 10 seconds) apply herbicide to the lower stump.

Foliar spray

Target foliage: spray stems, seedling and regrowth less than 2m tall. Foliar spraying is suitable to use when Cat's claw creeper is carpeting the ground but be careful to avoid native plant species.

Generally, do not spray Cat's claw creeper growing up trees as you may kill the tree. If you spot the flower and vine on your property, one of the easiest and cheapest ways (though time consuming) to temporarily control Cat's claw creeper is by cutting the stems of the vine.

3. Biocontrol

Another method of control is known as biological control involving the use of living organisms (usually the natural predators of the pest species) to reduce growth and reproduction.

Three biocontrol agents for Cat's claw creeper have been released in Australia:

- Leaf-mining jewel beetle (*Hylaeogena jureceki*)
- Leaf-sucking tingid (*Carvalhotingis visenda*)
- Leaf-tying moth (*Hypocosmia pyrochroma*)

Biocontrol can be practical in difficult to reach areas, where it would be hard or impossible to physically remove the weed or apply herbicide.

Spraying Cat's claw creeper with herbicide can be effective, providing herbicides are carefully chosen and selectively applied when plants are actively growing.



Make sure you use the proper safety equipment when spraying with herbicide.



Leaf-mining jewel beetle
Photo: Biosecurity Queensland

Follow up monitoring is critical and additional control may be needed.

Are vines beginning to die? Have any vines re-shooted? Has your biocontrol spread any further?

Supporting the community

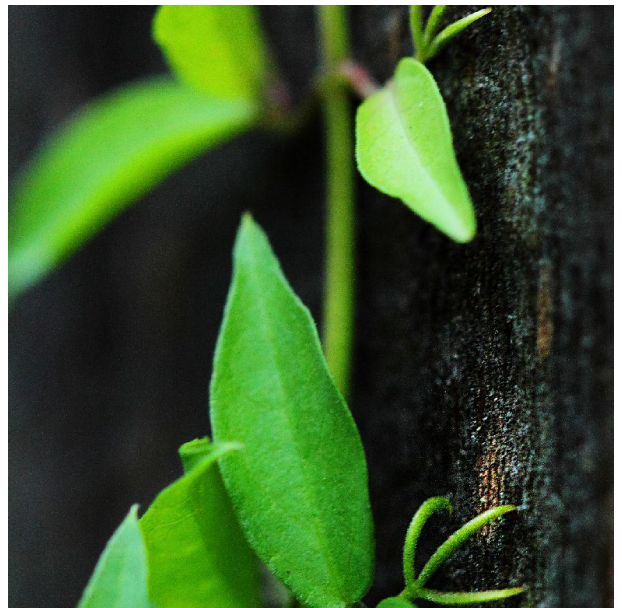
Healthy Land & Water is supporting community action in targeted catchments across the region to control Cat's claw creeper.

With control, native habitat condition will improve in these catchments. This will also help to improve water quality, catchment health and protect valuable agricultural land.

Want to learn more or be involved?

If you would like to know where target catchments are or you would like to be kept up to date about upcoming workshops or assistance available through your local community group, please feel free to contact Healthy Land & Water via the details below.

Also keep a look out for upcoming events on the Healthy Land & Water events calendar.



*Tendrils shaped like a cat's claw.
Photo by Ben <https://flic.kr/p/aTC5Vn>*

Healthy Land & Water is supporting a number of groups across South East Queensland, through funding from the Queensland Government for the productive and responsible use of the State's natural resources.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Key facts about Cat's claw creeper, Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry <http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/plants/weeds-pest-animals-ants/weeds/a-z-listing-of-weeds/photo-guide-to-weeds/cats-claw-creeper>

Weed management guide for Cat's claw creeper
http://www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/catsclawcreeper/docs/WMG_CATS_CLAW_CREEPER-final.pdf

Cat's claw creeper, weed of national significance
<http://www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/catsclawcreeper/>



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**Delivering an environment
for future generations to thrive**

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