

Lantana

Lantana camara



Currently, lantana covers more than 5 million ha of the east coast from southern New South Wales to Far North Queensland. Small infestations of lantana have also been found in central west Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria. Efforts are under way to control these.

Lantana is mainly spread by people (as ornamental plants) and fruit-eating birds. It forms dense thickets that smother and kill native vegetation and are impenetrable to animals, people and vehicles.

Research indicates more than 1400 native species are negatively affected by lantana invasion, including many endangered and threatened species. As lantana is a woody shrub that has thin, combustible canes, its presence can also create hotter bushfires.

Declaration details

All lantana species are declared Class 3 plants under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*. Lantana species cannot be sold or distributed and landholders may be required to control these plants if they pose a threat to an environmentally significant area.

Description and general information

Lantana is a heavily branched shrub that can grow in compact clumps, dense thickets or as a climbing vine.

The stems are square in cross section, with small, recurved prickles. Most leaves are about 6 cm long and are covered in fine hairs. They are bright green above, paler beneath and have round-toothed edges. Leaves grow opposite one another along the stem. When crushed the leaves produce a distinctive odour.

Flowers appear throughout most of the year in clustered, compact heads about 2.5 cm in diameter. Flower colours vary from pale cream to yellow, white, pink, orange and red. Lantana produces round, berry-like fruit that turn from glossy green to purplish-black when ripe.

For rural producers, lantana poses problems of stock poisoning and invasion of desirable pasture. An economic impact assessment indicated lantana costs the Queensland grazing sector in excess of \$70 million (2005–06 values) per year. It is now illegal to sell or distribute any variety of lantana in Queensland. However, garden plantings are still common in many areas and have the potential to cause problems of their own.



Despite being sold and marketed as ‘sterile’ plants, research indicates some ornamental lantana varieties have the ability to set seed and can spread vegetatively. They also produce some viable pollen and have the potential to cross-pollinate with wild forms, creating new varieties that could naturalise in the environment.

If the number of naturalised varieties increases due to genetic drift from ornamental varieties it will make finding effective biological control agents even more difficult, and potentially extend the climatic tolerances and range of the weed’s spread.

Habitat and distribution

Lantana is native to the tropical and subtropical regions of Central and South America.

It is found throughout most coastal and subcoastal areas of eastern Australia, from Far North Queensland to southern New South Wales. It grows in a wide variety of habitats, from exposed dry hillsides to wet, heavily shaded gullies.

Toxicity

Many lantana varieties are poisonous to stock. It is difficult to tell which varieties are toxic so it is better to treat all forms as potentially poisonous. The toxins in lantana include the triterpene acids, lantadene A (rehmannic acid), lantadene B, and their reduced forms.

Most cases of lantana poisoning occur when new stock are introduced into lantana-infested areas. Stock bred on lantana-infested country avoid lantana unless forced to eat it due to lack of other fodder. Young animals introduced to lantana areas are most at risk.

Symptoms of lantana poisoning depend on the quantity and type of lantana consumed and, under some circumstances, the intensity of light to which the animals are exposed.

Early symptoms of depression are noticeable, with head swaying, loss of appetite, constipation and frequent urination. After a day or two the eyes and the skin of the nose and mouth start yellowing with jaundice, and the muzzle becomes dry and warm. The eyes may become inflamed and have a slight discharge. The animal also becomes increasingly sensitive to light. Finally, the muzzle becomes inflamed, moist and very painful (‘pink nose’). Areas of skin may peel and slough off. Death commonly occurs 1–4 weeks after symptoms occur. Death from acute poisoning can occur 3–4 days after eating the plant.

If animals show any of the early symptoms, they should be moved to lantana-free areas, kept in the shade and monitored. Veterinary treatment should be sought immediately. Some remedies may include intravenous fluids, treating skin damage with antibiotics, or drenching with an activated charcoal slurry.

Care should be taken when introducing new or young animals into a paddock if lantana is present. Ensure they have enough fodder to stop them eating lantana in quantities sufficient to result in poisoning. During drought, animals should not be placed in lantana-infested areas without alternative food.

Control

Using a mix (integration) of control methods gives the best results. Size, density and geographic location of infestations are important considerations for choosing which control methods to use. A general principle is to commence control programs in areas of light infestations and work towards the denser infestations.

For large lantana infestations, treatment with herbicides by foliar spraying is usually not economically feasible. However, fire, dozing/stick raking, slashing/cutting, aerial helicopter spraying can reduce dense infestations, making follow-up spot treatments with chemicals more economically viable.

Lantana seed banks remain viable for at *least* four years, so follow-up control to kill seedlings before they mature is vital to ensure initial management efforts to control the parent bush are not wasted.

Appropriate fire regimes may become part of a management program to ensure lantana invasiveness is reduced and pasture is maintained.

Removal of lantana within areas of remnant vegetation may require a permit under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. Further information should be sought from the Department of Environment and Resource Management before works commence.

Mechanical control

Stick raking or ploughing can be effective in removing standing plants. However, regrowth from stumps and/or increased seedling germination in disturbed soil is common and the site will require follow-up treatment.

Grubbing of small infestations—for example, along fence lines—can be a useful and effective method of removing plants, though this is time consuming.

Repeated slashing can also reduce the vigour of lantana, exhausting its stored resources and reducing its likelihood of re-shooting.

Some locations—for example, very steep inclines or gullies—are not suitable for mechanical control options because of the danger of overturning machinery and soil erosion.

Fire

Regular burning will reduce the capacity of plants to survive; however, initial kill rates are variable.

The effectiveness of this method will depend on the suitability of available fuel loads, fire intensity, temperature, relative humidity, soil moisture and season. Pasture re-establishment can then provide competition to inhibit lantana seed germination.

Fire is not recommended in non-fire tolerant vegetated areas such as rainforest, or wooded or plantation areas.

A typical control program for fire may include:

- exclude stock to establish a pasture fuel load
- burning (may require a permit)
- sow improved pastures—consult your local Biosecurity Queensland officer for advice
- continue to exclude stock until pasture has established and seeded
- burn again in summer before rain and spot spray lantana regrowth when > 0.5 m high and when it is actively growing (see Table 1).

Herbicide control

Herbicide recommendations for lantana are shown in Table 1. Users of herbicides have a legal obligation to read herbicide labels and use only the registered rates. Always use herbicides responsibly; adhere to legislation and safety requirements.

Variation in results can be a result of inconsistent application methods, mix rates or seasonal variation. Red-flowered and pink-edged red-flowered lantana are often considered the most difficult to control because their leaves are often smaller and tougher. However, herbicides can kill these varieties if you carefully follow application procedures.

For single-stemmed lantana, basal bark spraying and cut stump methods also give good results at any time of year (but best when the plant is actively growing). On multi-stemmed varieties, you will obtain best results by carefully applying herbicide to each stem.

When treating actively growing plants less than 2 m high, overall spraying of foliage to the point of run-off is recommended. Splatter gun techniques are also effective and particularly useful in hard-to-access areas. This is best done in autumn—when sap flows draw the poison down into the root stock, but before night temperatures get too cold.

Remove grazing animals from spray areas during and soon after treatment. Stress can cause increased sugar levels in the leaves of lantana plants, making them more palatable.

Landholders and contractors should check if the property is situated in a hazardous area. This prevents the use of some chemicals, as defined in the *Agricultural Chemicals Distribution Control Act 1966*.

Biological control

Since 1914, 31 biological control agents have been introduced into Australia in an attempt to control lantana. Seventeen have established, of which several insect species cause seasonal damage, reducing the vigour and competitiveness of lantana in some areas.

Biosecurity Queensland research programs continue to investigate agents suitable for release in Australia, and test the viability of these agents in an effort to identify more effective biological control agents.

It is important to remember that biological control alone should not be relied upon for managing lantana infestations. Consideration should be given to other available control techniques.

The four most important biological control agents are:

- **sap-sucking bug (*Teleonemia scrupulosa*)**
Found in dry areas from Cooktown to Wollongong, this small, mottled, bug feeds on the underside of leaves, growing tips and flower buds, causing the leaves to drop early and stopping the plant from flowering.
- **leaf-mining beetle (*Uroplata girardi*)**
Found in most lantana infestations from Cape Tribulation to Sydney as well as around Darwin, except in very dry or high altitude areas. The adult beetles are dark brown. They shelter in curled leaves and feed on the upper leaf surfaces. Larvae feed in leaves causing blotches to spread across the leaf. This beetle reduces plant vigour and can suppress flowering.
- **leaf-mining beetle (*Octotoma scabripennis*)**
Found in most lantana infestations from Atherton to Wollongong. Adults of this species feed on the upper leaf surface, while larvae feed and mine the centre of the leaf and cause blotches. This activity reduces plant vigour and can suppress flowering.
- **seed-feeding fly (*Ophiomyia lantanae*)**
Found from Cape Tribulation to Eden in New South Wales and also around Darwin and Perth. *Ophiomyia* is a small black fly that feeds on flowers and lays eggs on the green fruits. The maggots of the fly eat the seed and make the fruit unattractive to birds, reducing seed spread.

Other agents such as *Aconophora compressa* (a stem-sucking bug) and *Leptobyrsa decora* (a sap-sucking bug) have caused some damage in specific geographic areas.

Note: Landholders are advised not to consume their time collecting established insects for distribution. Due to their own ability to disperse, these insects will be periodically/seasonally present in areas that are climatically suitable for them.

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland (call 13 25 23 or visit our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au).

Table 1. Herbicides for control of lantana

Method of application: active ingredient (trade name) ^a	Rate	Optimum time ^b	Remarks
Foliar (overall) spray			
Fluroxypyr (Starane® 200)	0.5 L to 1 L/100 L water	December to April	Thorough wetting of plants is required, higher rate should be used for larger plants
Glyphosate (Roundup® 360, Glyphosate 360®)	1 L/100 L water	October to April	Wet plant thoroughly. Glyphosate affects any green plant it comes into contact with. Glyphosate is available in a range of strengths
Picloram + 2,4-D (Tordon® 75-D)	0.65 L/100 L water	February to April	Wet plant thoroughly. Legumes are affected if sprayed
Dichlorprop (Lantana® 600)	0.5 L/100 L water	December to April	Must thoroughly wet all leaves. Please refer to product label for situation details
Picloram + triclopyr + aminopyralid (Grazon Extra®)	0.35 L to 0.5 L/100 L water	February to April	Wet plant thoroughly. Use the higher rate on larger plants. Legumes may be affected if sprayed
2,4-D amine (Amicide® 625)	0.32 L/100 L water	March to May	Red-flowered lantanas are more resistant to 2,4-D. Will kill young legumes
Metsulfuron methyl, (Brush-off®, Brushkiller® 600, Lynx® 600)	10 g/100 L water ^b	March to May	Results variable. Not found effective in tropics. Follow-up sprays are necessary
Metsulfuron methyl + glyphosate (Cutout®)	95 g/100 L water	March to May	Apply to bushes up to 2 m tall. Spray to thoroughly wet all foliage and stems. Spray to penetrate throughout the bush
Metsulfuron methyl + glyphosate (Trounce®)	173 g/100 L water	March to May	Apply when actively growing. Do not apply during periods of stress
Aminopyralid + fluroxypyr (Hotshot®)	0.5 L to 0.7 L/100 L water	October to April	Spray all foliage, including stems, to the point of run-off
(i) Basal bark (ii) Cut stump			
Triclopyr (Garlon 600®)	1 L/60 L diesel	Any time. Best results when actively growing	(i) Apply to lower 40 cm of every stem. Must ensure complete coverage around stem (ii) Cut close to ground level. Immediately apply herbicide
2,4-D ester (AF Rubber Vine Spray®)	2.5 L/100 L diesel	Any time. Best results when actively growing	As above
Picloram + Triclopyr (Access®)	1 L/60 L diesel	Any time. Best results when actively growing	As above
Picloram (Vigilant® Herbicide Gel)	3 mm to 5 mm gel	Any time. Best results when actively growing	(ii) If diameter of stump is > 20 mm, use a minimum of 5 mm gel thickness
Glyphosate (Roundup®, Weedmaster Duo®)	Neat	Any time. Best results when actively growing	Off-label permit
Splatter gun			
Glyphosate (Roundup® 360)	1:9 glyphosate +water	October to April	2 x 2 ml dose per 0.5 m height of lantana
Metsulfuron methyl (Brushkiller® 600, Lynx® 600)	2 g/L water	March to May	As above
Aerial			
Picloram + triclopyr + 2,4-D (Grazon® DS + 2,4-D amine 625 g/L)	1.5 L + 6 L/ha or 10 L/ha (Grazon®)	When plant actively growing	Helicopter only. Minimum of 200 L water per hectare. Follow-up re-spray will be required. Do not burn within six months of treatment
Dichlorprop(Lantana® 600)	6 L to 8 L L/ha	When plant actively growing	As above

a Only some common trade names provided.

b Optimum times are only a guide. Lantana must be actively growing for the herbicide to work.

® = Registered trade name.

Labels often recommend the additional use of a wetting agent or surfactant within the mix. Herbicides types vary in their selectivity against other species and soil residual.

Fact sheets are available from Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) service centres and our Customer Service Centre (telephone 13 25 23). Check our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this fact sheet should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation, and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the use of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, DEEDI does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.