Cat's claw creeper

Macfadyena unguis-cati (L.) A.H.Gentry
(syn. *Dolichandra unguis-cati* (L.) L.Lohmann)

Cat's claw creeper is a native of tropical America and is an aggressive climber that was used as an ornamental in older-style Queensland gardens. This vine has the ability to completely smother native vegetation, even growing up over trees, and many bushland areas already have serious infestations of this weed. The vine has a vigorous root and tuber system, which adds to difficulties in controlling the weed.

Cat's claw creeper has been recognised as a Weed of National Significance due to its invasiveness and potential impacts.

Legal requirements

Cat's claw creeper is a category 3 restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. It must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment. The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks associated with invasive plants under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation (GBO).

Queensland Government

At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive plants in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on cat's claw creeper. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

Description

Cat's claw creeper is a vine with long slender stems. Older stems become very woody with time. Its leaves each have two leaflets, with a three-clawed tendril (the cat's claw) growing between them. It has large, bright yellow, bell-shaped flowers in spring. The vine bears very long, narrow and flat pods containing many papery seeds.

Life cycle

Seed capsules mature in late summer to autumn, approximately 8–10 months after flowering. Seed begins to drop in late May, with peaks in July and August. Seeds germinate best when not buried and will germinate readily in moist leaf litter. Although seed viability is low, seed production is high and some seeds produce multiple seedlings.

Established plants can reproduce vegetatively from tubers and creeping stems. Detached tubers and cuttings may re-sprout in moist conditions. Roots start to develop tubers in their second year and plants may be well established before they start to flower.

Methods of spread

Cat's claw creeper produces numerous seeds with papery wings that aid dispersal, particularly by water and wind. Tuberous roots also spread by floods and humans.

Habitat and distribution

Cat's claw creeper is native in Central and South America and the West Indies. It is widely naturalised around the world, occurring in southern Africa, south-eastern USA and Hawaii, Asia, the Pacific Islands, Republic of Cape Verde, Mascarene and recently in Europe. Cat's claw creeper grows in a range of soil types, but does not tolerate poorly drained soils. Plants are capable of surviving heavy frost but seed germination is reduced at low temperatures.

Cat's claw creeper prefers warm-temperate, tropical and sub-tropical areas. It can be found in gardens, over fences, along roadsides, waterways and in disturbed rainforests. It occurs in coastal and sub-coastal areas of south-eastern Queensland, and in central and northern Queensland.

Control

Managing cat's claw creeper

The GBO requires a person to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks posed by cat's claw creeper. This fact sheet provides information and some options for controlling cat's claw creeper.

Physical control

Use a pruning saw, machete or brush hook to cut all leads/stems up the trees. All above the cut will die, but regrowth will occur from the underground tubers.

Digging the tubers out is not practical in most cases. Don't allow the regrowth to reach host tree's canopy; if they get away you will have to re-cut them.

Herbicide control

The regrowth is best treated with a foliar spray. Glyphosate 360 (mixed at a rate of 83 mL to each 1 L of water) can be applied in a cut stump method. It is best done in pairs. Cut the lead as close to the ground as possible and spray/paint on the herbicide.

The glyphosate must be applied within 15 seconds of cutting—while the sap is running—to take the poison down into the roots and tubers. If not within 15 seconds, re-cut lower and try again.

Because of the multitude of tubers the herbicide tends to knock them down one at a time with new regrowth coming from the next tuber. Be prepared to continue control over the next five years.

PER13914 allows the use of products containing 300 g/L of triclopyr plus 100 g/L picloram with or without 8 g/L aminopyralid, subject to particular conditions that are set out in the permit.

The herbicides listed in the table that follows are permitted to be used in the listed situations. Before using any herbicide always read the label carefully. All herbicides must be applied strictly in accordance with the directions on the label and the conditions in the APVMA permit.

Biological control

Cat's claw creeper is currently a target for biological control. The tingid bug *Carvalhotingis visenda*, the moth *Hypocosmia pyrochroma* and a leaf-mining jewel beetle *Hylaeogena jureceki* have been released. The tingid is widely established in majority of release sites and cause visible effects in some areas.

More information

More information is available from your local government or visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

Table 1. Herbicides for the control of cat's claw creeper

Situation	Herbicide	Rate	Comments
Pasture, non-crop situation (PERMIT 10533)	Glyphosate 360 g/L (e.g. Weedmaster Duo)	10 mL/L water	Foliar application Ensure vines are actively growing at time of treatment and not under stress of drought, waterlogging or cold (0–2 m high). High-volume (knapsack or handgun) spray to wet foliage, ensuring complete coverage over top growing terminals.
		83 mL/L water	Cut stump Ensure vines are actively growing at time of treatment and not under stress of drought, waterlogging or cold. Cut vine close to ground and wet stump surface thoroughly using splatter gun, spray, swab or brush. Remove any branches on the stump and treat any cut surface.
	Dicamba 500 g/L (e.g. Kamba 500)	4 mL/L water	Foliar application Ensure vines are actively growing at time of treatment and not under stress of drought, waterlogging or cold (0–2 m high). High-volume (knapsack or handgun) spray to wet foliage, ensuring complete coverage over top growing terminals.
		33 mL/L water	Cut stump Ensure vines are actively growing at time of treatment and not under stress of drought, waterlogging or cold. Cut vine close to ground and wet stump surface thoroughly using splatter gun, spray, swab or brush. Remove any branches on the stump and treat any cut surface.
Non-agricultural areas, domestic and public service areas, commercial and industrial areas, bushland/ native forests, roadsides, rights-of-way, vacant lots, wastelands, wetlands, dunal and coastal areas	Fluroxypyr 200 g/L (e.g. FMC Fluroxypyr 200 Herbicide)	35 mL/L Diesel/kerosene	Basal bark spray (PERMIT 11463)
Riparian zones	Triclopyr 300 g/L plus picloram 100 g/L (e.g. Nufarm Conqueror)or Triclopyr 300 g/L plus Picloram 100 g/L plus Aminopyralid 8 g/L (e.g. Grazon Extra)	400 mL of product per 100 L water	Foliar spray. Avoid getting spray on leaves of host and do not spray within 5 m of a waterway. Other restrictions apply. (PERMIT 13914).

Persons who wish to prepare for use and/or use products for the purposes specified in APVMA permits PER11463 or PER10533 must read, or have read to them, the details and conditions of the permit. APVMA permit PER11463 expires on 30 April 2027 and PER10533 expires on 31 July 2028. Both are available from the APVMA website at apvma.gov.au

Read the label carefully before use and always use the herbicide in accordance with the directions on the label.

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