

Pest plant – Horehound

(Marrubium vulgare)

Fact sheet March 2017

What is it?

Horehound is a spreading, bushy, aromatic perennial weed growing to 80cm. It has a similar shape and form to lavender.

Horehound thrives on poor soil and in waste places. It invades poor pastures where there is little competition and is unpalatable for livestock. Because of its ability to invade disturbed vegetation, it is also a recognised environmental weed.

Horehound is adapted to a Mediterranean climate similar to conditions across the southern half of SA where annual rainfall exceeds 200 mm. It grows on neutral to alkaline soils, is resistant to levels of frost found in SA and can survive summer droughts.

Horehound is a declared weed under the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 (NRM Act).

What does it look like?

Stems

The stems are square and covered with white, cottony hairs.

Leaves

Horehound has velvety, near-circular green-grey leaves in opposite pairs. They are deeply veined and wrinkled with toothed edges and are covered with white, cottony hairs, especially on the lower leaf surface.

Flowers

Small white flowers are produced during summer and autumn in dense whorls in the leaf axils along the upper part of the shoot.

Seeds

Up to 4 seeds per burr, 1-2mm long

History

Horehound is native to temperate Eurasia, Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean region including North Africa. It was first recorded as naturalised in Australia by the 1840s. In South Australia it is estimated to occur on 20 million hectares of land.



Image credit: Edible Wild Food. The velvety leaves of horehound.

Why is it a problem?

- Horehound tolerates drought and poor soils and spreads when palatable species have been overgrazed or drought effected.
- Horehound invades disturbed ground such as roadsides, grazing land and waste ground.
- Horehound is not very palatable to stock and the plants flavour taints meat if grazed.
- The burrs contaminate wool, reducing the value of fleece.

Distribution

Horehound has spread to its limits in SA, being widespread in all settled and pastoral areas with at least 200 mm annual rainfall.

On Kangaroo Island horehound has a scattered distribution and is locally abundant. It has the potential to spread much more widely across Kangaroo Island where alkaline or neutral soils are present.

How is it spread?

Horehound seed is dispersed by animals, stock or car tyres. The dry, hooked, fruit or burr attaches readily to wool, fur or clothing.

Water can disperse seed and seed may be carried in mud on vehicles. Horses are also known to pass seeds in a viable condition after ingestion.



Mature plants can produce in excess of 20,000 seeds per year and seeds can survive in the soil for 7-10 years.

How do we control it?

Preventing the spread of horehound is the best control measure. Be aware of the risks of purchasing stock, fodder and machinery from contaminated areas. Clean shoes, equipment, machinery and vehicles before returning to the region from infested areas.

Small infestations can be controlled by grubbing plants or spot-spraying. Bag and dispose of seed on site responsibly.

A combination of control methods in conjunction with good pasture management and revegetation can be applied to dense infestations for best long-term control. Don't allow horehound to flower and set seed before treatment. Aim to maintain or reduce horehound densities to manageable levels.

Control options include cultivation, grazing, and chemical control. For advice on chemical control techniques contact the Natural Resources Centre in Kingscote or download the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* for advice on chemical control http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds_and_pest_animals/weeds_in_sa.

Biological control is present on Kangaroo Island and helps to limit the spread and density of horehound infestations, though is not effective as a standalone method. Plume moth larvae are small green caterpillars that severely damage the plant's growing tips as they feed. This weakens the plant and reduces the number of flowers and seeds produced.

Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to horehound on Kangaroo Island:

- 175 (2) Cannot transport the plant or anything carrying it**
- 177 (1) Cannot sell the plant**
- 177 (2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant**
- 182 (2) Landowner must control the plant on their land**
- 185 NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners.**

For more information

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Natural Resources
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