Restricted category 3

Blue thunbergia

Thunbergia grandiflora (syn. *Thunbergia laurifolia*)

Blue thunbergia was promoted and sold as an attractive garden plant, and became widespread in Queensland gardens. This vigorous plant soon escaped into native bushland and began causing considerable environmental damage.

The plant climbs and smothers native vegetation, with the weight of the vine often pulling down mature trees.

Large tubers degrade creek and river banks and make destruction of blue thunbergia difficult.

In garden situations, it will also quickly spread and the large tubers may cause damage to paths, fences and foundations. Other ornamental species of thunbergia (black-eyed Susan, scarlet clock vine, golden glory vine, lady's slipper) are not as invasive, however, they are not recommended for planting because of their potential to spread into surrounding bush land.

Thunbergia species are a major threat to remnant vegetation in the wet tropics.

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Legal requirements

Blue thunbergia is a restricted category 3 invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. It must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment.

Some specimens collected in Queensland were previously identified as *Thunbergia laurifolia*. These are now considered to be *Thunbergia grandiflora*.

The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks associated with invasive plants under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation (GBO).

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 blue thunbergia. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

Description

Blue thunbergia is a vigorous perennial twining vine climbing up to 15 m high if supported.

Leaves are opposite along the stem up to 15 cm long, 10 cm wide and broad-based narrowing to a pointed tip.

The trumpet-shaped flowers have a short, broad tube, white on the outside, yellowish inside, which expands to five rounded, pale lavender-blue petals, one larger than the others. The flowers are up to 8 cm long and 6–8 cm across.

The seed pod is inconspicuous, cone shaped, 3–5 cm long, with a rounded base. The seed is flat, up to 1 cm long and covered with brown scales. It is catapulted several meters when the ripe pod splits.

The plant develops a very tuberous root system, some tubers being as large as 70 kg. The root system, when cut, persistently sprouts from its many dormant buds.

Life cycle

Blue thunbergia reproduces via seed. Seeds in pods are catapulted several meters when the pod splits. Fruits are only produced in warmer climates. Blue thunbergia is also capable of regenerating from stem fragments or portions of the tuberous roots and vegetatively by stolons.

Methods of spread

Blue thunbergia is spread by people for ornamental plantings and dispersal of root pieces along river banks during floods, or transport from infested sites with earth removed for fill or other soil use.

Habitat and distribution

Native to northern India and tropical Africa, and grow best in frost-free locations. Infestations of blue thunbergia are patchy and are mostly scattered along coastal streams from the Tully River to the Daintree. Areas of acute infestation are the Mulgrave River, the Johnstone River and lower Mossman River.

Control

Manging blue thunbergia

The GBO requires a person to take reasonable and practical measures to minimise the biosecurity risks posed by blue thunbergia. This fact sheet provides information and some options for controlling blue thunbergia.

Prevention and early detection

Blue thunbergia was originally sought for its attractive lavender flowers, and spread primarily via the ornamental plant trade.

Public awareness of this garden escapee, with its vigorous growth and alarming potential to spread, is increasing. Existing garden specimens should be destroyed and replaced with other species. Plant cuttings should not be dumped—this is a frequent source of new weed infestations.

The origin of new top soil or fill should be checked as physical transportation of plant segments in soil or flood waters is a major method of spread.

Mechanical control

The cutting of the vines at ground level will give a smothered tree a reprieve, but regeneration of the vine from tubers will soon occur.

Only small plants can be dug out, as established plants normally have extensive underground tubers.

Spraying or injecting with herbicides is often the only option.

Herbicide control

Herbicide treatment is often the only option available and provides fast and effective control.

Imazapyr is the only herbicide registered for control of thunbergia. Foliar and cut stem applications of imazapyr are also allowed in other situations under a permit (PER10557). Glyphosate can be used for aerial spot spraying under another permit (PER12363) see Table 1.

Imazapyr is systemic, so when applied as a foliar spray it is transported within the plant to destroy the underground tubers.

Imazapyr is very effective in killing blue thunbergia but it does not drastically affect surrounding vegetation. Good application technique should result in few non-target plants being destroyed.

Although very effective, one application by either overall spraying or injection rarely achieves 100% success. Ongoing monitoring and follow-up is needed.

More information

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

Table 1. Herbicides for the control of blue thunbergia

Situation	Herbicide	Rate	Registration details	Comments
Around agricultural buildings and other farm non-crop situations, commercial, industrial and public service areas, rights-of-way, wasteland and away from desirable vegetation	Imazapyr 250 g/kg (e.g. Unimaz 250 SL)	7.5 mL/L per 1 L water	Registered	Foliar Apply sufficient spray to wet the surface visibly to the point of run-off. For effective control, apply when the plant is actively growing.
Non-agricultural areas, bushland, forests, parks, public areas and residential areas	Imazapyr 240 g/kg (e.g. Rotary Max) or Imazapyr 250 g/kg (e.g. Unimaz 250 SL)	Mix product with water to a ratio of 1:1 (Imazapyr: water)	APVMA permit PER10557 for use by general persons	Cut stem/tuber Make a 'V' shape cut and apply 2 mL of the mixture into the cut. Once treatment applied join the pieces of stem/ tuber back together.
		Apply 7.5 mL per 1 L water		Foliar Apply when plant is actively growing. Apply via knapsack and spray to the point of run off. DO NOT apply more than one application per year.
Natural ecosystems (non-agricultural)	Glyphosate 360 g/L (e.g. Weedmaster Duo)	1: 50 (glyphosate:water)	APVMA permit PER12363 for use by officers/ contractors of government agencies, QPWS, or NRM groups	Aerial spot spray from helicopter or unmanned aircraft vehicles.

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

Fact sheets are available from biosecurity.qld.gov.au. The control methods recommended 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, the department does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.