

WEEDWATCH #3: Himalayan Blackberry

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Weedwatch is an occasional series of information sheets on invasive weeds in western Washington.

Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus* or *R. discolor*) – Himalayan blackberry was intentionally introduced to this country for fruit production and it makes tasty berries, no doubt. However, this plant seems to have invaded every open sunny space in all corners of our region, smothering native understory vegetation, impeding the movement of large mammals, and increasing erosion potential. Blackberry can easily overrun vast areas. Although there is no legal requirement for controlling this plant, here are some “easy” ways to deal with it.

Mechanical: To control large populations, first chop the stems with a brush cutter or mower several times a year (for steep slopes, try a chainsaw-type pole pruner). Watch for hazards hidden within the thicket. If you chop the plants by hand, wear goggles, thick leather gloves and canvas clothing to protect your skin. If only one pass is possible, mow as the plants begin to flower. Chopping the canes does not result in new growth from lateral roots but new sprouts will emerge from the root crown. To prevent this, grub out the bulbous, gnarled mass of the crown, a few inches below ground, with a claw mattock, pulaski or shovel. Though exhausting at times, manual removal is often quite effective. Small populations can be hand-pulled following a rain to facilitate removal of as much roots as possible.



Goats: Goats will effectively graze young populations or re-sprouts up to four years old, but they will only strip off the leaves and ignore the tough canes of older plants. Palatability of this weed is relatively low so limit access to alternative browse. Root crowns must be addressed with another method of control.

Spray: Herbicide applied to the leaves is most successful after seed set, while the plant is bearing fruit and most of the foliage is still green (late August through October). Subsequent treatments should occur before the first frost. Use a 2% solution of triclopyr (Brush-B-Gone) herbicide with dye added so you can see which plants have been treated. This herbicide is “non-selective” so be sure to avoid desirable plants. Cut down the treated canes only after they have completely died, usually 2–6 weeks after treatment. In the following year, repeat this treatment or one of the others listed here.

Cut stump treatment: In late spring, cut each stem and immediately paint the surface with 1–2% triclopyr, using a cheap foam brush. Working with another person can increase efficiency. You can also treat just-mowed stumps in this way, as long as it is within 15 minutes of cutting, but they can be hard to find/keep track of and the ragged cuts are harder to paint. Several treatments may be necessary.

Shading: Blackberries in the sun can produce 650–1200 seeds per square foot, but in deep, evergreen shade they produce zero. Growth is also much less dense and vigorous. Deciduous shade is less effective in reducing blackberry production, but their growth will be somewhat reduced. Try suppressing blackberries long enough to establish newly planted evergreen trees and shrubs; deep shade is probably your best bet for long-term control.

Plant and mulch: Always follow weed control with thick woody mulch and dense planting of native species, especially thicket-forming shrubs such as nootka rose, salmonberry, or snowberry.