

# BLACKBERRY

## RUBUS FRUTICOSUS

### Why is it a weed?

It is an invasive pest of pasture and forestry

### Where is it found?

Nationwide

### Is it toxic?

No

### Alternative uses?

Pie!



MILTON MUNRO

I owe a lot to my parents. They sculpted me into the brilliant yet modest creature you see before you - I'll give you all a moment to admire. Finished? Good, I shall continue.

From my father I gained a love of science and a healthy respect for the natural world. From my mother I gained a love of food and a passion for whipping up a storm in the kitchen. These two inherited traits work well together, with every meal being a lesson in chemistry and biology to my long suffering family. Occasionally though, something happens that causes a clash between my two natures. In this case I'm thinking of the weed blackberry where half of me wants to kill it and the other half of me wants pie.

Blackberry is a noxious pest found all over New Zealand. Blackberries are native to the northern hemisphere but have effectively colonised the entire world. They originally made their way to New Zealand with the early British

**MILTON MUNRO is a soil and plant scientist for rural supply company PGG Wrightson. He looks at common pasture weeds you'll find on your block and how to deal with them.**



settlers who fancied a bit of blackberry pie (mmmmm... pie). They had no idea that blackberry would naturalise, adapt and thrive in the New Zealand conditions.

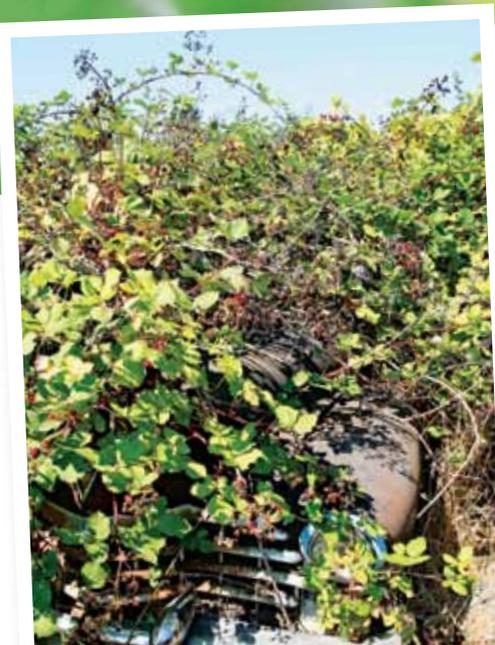
Blackberry dominates forestry blocks in some parts of the country, where it robs the yield from the trees. It is also a major pain in pastoral areas where it carpets over pasture species and even traps sheep in its hooks.

Blackberries are members of the Rosaceae family, which includes such notable members as the raspberry, the apple, the peach, the plum and the rose, quite the distinguished lineage.

It's not all bad for the blackberry. Yes it's a noxious pest and yes, it needs to be eradicated but PIE! It makes the best pies. Blackberry pie, maybe with a little bit of apple, a nice homemade crispy and sweet pastry, some fresh pouring cream, maybe a dollop of ice cream for my philistine children. Am I right? Anyone needs a recipe sing out and I will hook you up.

Blackberries are very easy to identify. They begin their life as a long reaching stem growing from the crown of the plant. This stem (or primocane) can grow up to six metres in the first year. The leaves grow in clusters of five leaflets branching out from a central point, while the stem produces a large number of backward-facing spines.

The flowers are produced in clusters at the end of the stem and the five petals are often white or slightly pink in colour. If fertilised the flower produces the succulent blackberry. It's technically an aggregate of drupelets, which are fruits that have their fleshy bit surrounding their seed like peaches and plums. ■



## 3 WAYS TO CONTROL BLACKBERRY

Blackberry is quite tricky to control. There aren't many creatures that are keen to eat it, other than goats, and sheep will eat seedling plants but that's it.

Its prickly nature and the fact that it carpets whole areas quickly means hand weeding is often not an option.

The best option is to spray with products like Grazon or Tordon Brushkiller XT which are effective on blackberry and leave the grass alone but are very rough on clover so be warned.

However, for long term control it's not enough to just spray. You do need to clean up the dead plants, regrass the areas and monitor for re-establishing plants.