

THE demand for drugs, coupled with the Government crackdown on their use, has led to the use of remote, hidden areas for cultivating illegal drugs such as marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*).

Marijuana growing in State forest is a relatively common phenomena and on your next trip bushwalking you could quite easily stumble across a few plants.

Marijuana is a strong smelling, herbaceous, bushy plant, with branched clusters of flowers, and male and female flowers borne on separate plants. The leaves and flowers have been used as a narcotic for about 5000 years.

Marijuana is one of the oldest cultivated plants known to humankind. Since early times the fibrous stems have been used to make canvas and rope, and the seeds were used to make oil and even tablets to feed to livestock.

The plant also has hallucinogenic properties and has spawned a host of youth subcultures and even religious movements.

According to Detective Sergeant Roy Gascoigne of the Drug Squad, marijuana growing in State forest is very common, although most sites are usually small and very scattered.

However, he said some large plantations had been found in State forest around Manjimup and Walpole, including one discovered about eight years ago by members of the Army Reserve on exercise.

Larger plantations are well organised. Sprinkler systems are set up to satisfy the plants' need for large amounts of water, fertilisers are brought in and crops

If you go
down to
the woods
today.....



... you could be in for a big surprise.

are fenced off to protect them from grazing animals.

Growers are even prepared to camp beside their lucrative plantations for the two months or so necessary for the crop to reach maturity.

However, penalties are severe. Those caught cultivating *Cannabis* with intent to sell or supply face imprisonment for up to 10 years and a \$20 000 fine.

Detective Sergeant Gascoigne said that if a member of the public was bushwalking and came across a marijuana site they should report it to the local

This small marijuana plantation in a nature reserve, with a street-value of thousands of dollars, was found by the Police, but many more go undetected.

Photo-Courtesy of the W.A. Police ▼

police, especially if there were signs of camping, which could indicate a commercial operation.

No matter where marijuana is found, once the Police have located a crop and apprehended growers the Department of Conservation and Land Management, through it's Herbarium, plays an important role. If charges are laid and the plea is not guilty a botanist from the Herbarium must confirm that the species is indeed *Cannabis sativa*.

The Herbarium averages four identifications a week. If the plantation is large a botanist must go out into the field and take samples that will be used as evidence.

In late 1988, for example, a large plantation was found in State forest near Lake Muir. About 2000 *Cannabis* plants were growing in beds up the side of a sloping valley, fenced in by pea netting.

Duty Botanist Sue Patrick from the Herbarium said that crops grown in State forest or nature reserves were a threat to native vegetation.

"People who grow marijuana in these areas bring in trucks and fertiliser and cause a fair amount of disturbance, including clearing, which could introduce and spread weeds and dieback disease. However, marijuana is unlikely to grow by itself in the forest, as it needs a lot of water," she said.

The trouble is, plantations are hard to detect so, as long as marijuana remains a lucrative commodity, such illegal activity in State forest looks set to continue. □



LANDSCOPE

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Effluent disposal ponds from industry disfigure an idyllic strip of coastal land. But restoration work and a new conservation park are planned for the Leschenault Peninsula, near Bunbury. Turn to p.8.



Wood that was once only suitable for firewood can now be used to make high grade furniture. Find out how on p.24.



With spring approaching, the bush beckons...but without proper planning your walk could turn to disaster. See p.40.



A spectacular landscape, with an astounding array of plants and animals lies inland from Jurien Bay. Read about the Mt Lesueur area on p.28.



A population explosion of coral-eating snails threatens the unique reefs of Ningaloo Marine Park. How does CALM plan to counter their attack? See p.14.

COVER



In W.A.'s far north, Aboriginal rangers with ties to land now in national parks draw on the traditional wisdom of their people for use in Park management. Photo-Robert Garvey

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