

WEED ALERT

Horehound

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) is a really bad weed in the Goldfields region. Originally from the eastern Mediterranean, it is a spreading bushy plant covered with grey cottony hairs, has globular clusters of small white flowers in the leaf axils and a strong minty smell. The calyx is hooked and can contaminate wool. It likes to grow in disturbed open areas such as heavily-grazed pastoral paddocks, and is now so widespread on some Goldfields pastoral leases that it is almost uneconomical to undertake chemical control.

A biological control agent which is specific to horehound, the plume moth, is being tried. Its larvae feed on the growing tips of the plant, and work their way down the shoot while progressively defoliating the stem. The first time an introduction was tried, the plume moths were sourced from a high rainfall area of Victoria, and they did not survive in the arid Goldfields. This time moths from Murray Bridge in South Australia are being used, and hopefully they will cope better with the Goldfields climate.

Feral 'natives'

Last year Parks Victoria spent \$95,000 in Arthur's Seat State Park in trying to control an invader from Western Australia, Austral Bluebell, *Sollya heterophylla*, which had escaped from gardens.

Introductions from other States are not 'native' plants – beware of them! Noted author and weed campaigner Tim Low says: "One plant with time on its hands is Mat Rush, *Lomandra longifolia*, a domineering species in eastern Australia that is now sold in nurseries in Perth and sprouting prolifically in gardens there". Sold to satisfy the current fad for 'grass-like' plants in landscaping, I can personally verify its aggressiveness! And while we are considering garden plants that spread easily, watch out for *Diets iridoides* sprouting in bushland close to ornamental roadside or parkland plantings.

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