Blue thunbergia

*Thunbergia grandiflora* (syn. *Thunbergia laurifolia*)

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

The plant climbs and blankets native vegetation, with the weight of the vine often pulling down mature trees. Smothered vegetation also has dramatically reduced light levels to lower layers of vegetation, drastically limiting natural growth and killing many native plants.

Large tubers degrade creek and river banks and make destruction of the pest 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, they are all not recommended for planting because of their potential to spread into surrounding bushland.
Thunbergia species are a major threat to remnant vegetation in the wet tropics.

**Legal requirements**

Blue thunbergia is a restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. It must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment without a permit.

*Thunbergia annua* is not present in Queensland and is a prohibited invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. All sightings must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours.

The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks associated with invasive plants and animals under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation (GBO). This fact sheet gives examples of how you can meet your GBO.

At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive plants and animals in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on certain species. 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 up climbing up to 15 m if supported.

The leaves are opposite along the stem and can be confused with choko vine: up to 15 cm long and 10 cm broad, broad-based narrowing to a pointed tip, usually with deeply scalloped lobes towards the base.

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 metres 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 metres 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**

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.

*Thunbergia annua* is a weed in Sudan and has not yet been recorded in Australia. Every effort should be made to prevent this weed from entering Queensland, as prevention is better than cure.

**Control**

**Manging blue thunbergia**

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

**Prevention**

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 active registered for the control of thunbergia—see Table 1 below. It is systemic so when applied as a foliar spray it is transported within the plant to kill 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 killed.

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

**Further information**

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

### Table 1. Herbicides for the control of blue thunbergia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Herbicide</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Around agricultural buildings and other farm non-crop situations</td>
<td>imazapyr 250 g/kg (e.g. Unimaz 250 SL, Warrant 250)</td>
<td>7.5 mL/L water</td>
<td>Apply sufficient spray to wet the surface visibly to the point of run-off</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial, industrial, and public service areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For effective control, apply when the plant is actively growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights-of-way and wasteland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Away from desirable vegetation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-agricultural areas, bushland, forests, parks, public areas and</td>
<td>Mix product with water to a ratio of 1:1</td>
<td>Permit PER10557 (expires 30/09/2018)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>residential areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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