

## Fireweed Management by Neil Griffiths

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It is interesting how attitude to fireweed varies across NSW. Some areas see fireweed as a scourge and other areas consider it a manageable weed which gets a lot of attention because of its bright yellow flowers.

There is no doubt it can be highly competitive and a major problem in some situations but it is also seen to stop at fence lines which illustrates that it responds to management.



In districts where it is not common it is important that farmers identify fireweed as a seedling when it is easily controlled and not wait until it flowers before realising they have fireweed.

In districts where fireweed is widespread it can be expected to emerge as a problem if a paddock is disturbed – even though only scattered plants are seen before the disturbance.

The best long term control of fireweed is a dense competitive pasture which stops new seedlings from establishing. Thin or overgrazed pastures give the fireweed every opportunity to establish and it is able to grow and dominate unchecked by grazing while grasses, forage herbs and legumes are eaten because fireweed is unpalatable to cattle

Palatability versus poisoning is another quandary. No question that it is poisonous but if cattle don't like to eat it, then how much poisoning occurs? How much fireweed is actually eaten by cattle?

Sheep and goats on the other hand will eat fireweed and are more tolerant of the poisoning so they can provide an effective bio control in some areas.

Where fireweed density warrants herbicide use, bromoxynil has proved to be most effective in many trials. The problem with bromoxynil use is that it should be used when day time temperatures are less than 20C which gives a very narrow window of opportunity in the north and it has an 8-week withholding period for grazing which may not fit with pasture growth and grazing rotations. Other herbicide options are available but some of the alternative chemicals will kill legumes.

Slashing may be used to tidy up a paddock with moderate fireweed infestation but it won't kill the fireweed and may encourage it to persist into a second year.

The most difficult time to manage pastures to discourage fireweed is autumn. In a summer growing pasture, such as kikuyu, allow the pasture to grow and remain 'long' to stop most new fireweed germinating and establishing. However if the kikuyu is grazed hard, slashed or sprayed to allow establishment of new winter pasture, especially ryegrass and clover, then you will also provide ideal conditions for fireweed and need to plan its control during winter.

Small amounts of fireweed may be tolerated in hay and silage, but it will still be poisonous and effect palatability; so always best to conserve a clean paddock and graze the paddock with fireweed so that selective grazing allows the cattle to avoid the fireweed where possible.

For further information and photos see the [NSW DPI website](#).