



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
(360) 354-3990 www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds

BLACKBERRIES

Himalayan Blackberry *Rubus discolor*; **Evergreen Blackberry** *Rubus laciniatus*; **Trailing Blackberry** *Rubus ursinus*

Himalayan blackberry, evergreen (or cut-leaf) blackberry and trailing (or wild) blackberry are the three common blackberries in Whatcom County. Of these, only one, trailing blackberry, is native. The other two are both introduced plants, which have become aggressive weeds here. Despite being troublesome weeds, neither Himalayan nor evergreen blackberry is on the Washington State Noxious Weed List. The weed list addresses plants for which there is a realistic chance of state or countywide control and both these plants are so abundant that such control is unrealistic.

HIMALAYAN BLACKBERRY

THREAT: Himalayan blackberry is the most visible blackberry of Whatcom County, growing along roadsides, over fences and other vegetation, and invading many open areas. It is native to Western Europe and was probably first introduced into North America in 1885, as a cultivated crop. Himalayan blackberry is very aggressive, reproducing both vegetatively and through seed production, and can displace native vegetation. Seeds can be spread by birds, humans and other mammals. Blackberries can form suckers off roots, and canes will root when they touch the ground, forming new plants. New plants will also readily grow from pieces of root or cane. Himalayan blackberry quickly forms impenetrable thickets, consisting of both dead and live canes.



DESCRIPTION: Himalayan blackberry is a robust, sprawling, weak-stemmed shrub. The stems, called canes, grow upright at first, then cascade onto surrounding vegetation, forming large mounds or thickets of the blackberry. While some canes stay more erect, growing up to 9 feet high, others are more trailing, growing 20-40 feet long. The canes can take root at the tip, when they hit the ground, further expanding the infestation. Thorns grow along the stems, as well as on the leaves and leaf stalks. The leaves are palmate, usually with 5 large, oval, toothed leaflets. The leaflets are dark green on the upper surface and grayish-green below. Himalayan blackberry has white to light pink flowers, which produce a large, juicy, blackberry. The berries, which ripen between midsummer and autumn, are used as food by birds, humans and other mammals. Canes start producing berries in their second year. Individual canes may live only 2 to 3 years, with new stalks sprouting from the root crown. Himalayan blackberry can be evergreen, depending on the site.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Himalayan blackberry can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Seedlings can be hand pulled, especially in loose soil. Plants can also be hand dug. Care should be taken to remove as much of the root as possible, to prevent resprouting. Mowing can be used to control blackberries, but must be repeated throughout the growing season. Cutting and removing canes is a very short-term solution, as more canes will sprout from the root crown. However, these new sprouts could subsequently be treated with herbicide. If canes can only be removed once in a season, the best time is when the plant starts to flower, since much of the root reserves have gone into flowering. Himalayan blackberry can also be controlled through chemical means, although some herbicides can promote vegetative growth from lateral roots. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations. If herbicides are used during berry production, care should be taken to prevent people from using berries.

EVERGREEN BLACKBERRY

THREAT: Evergreen blackberry is a semi-erect shrub, introduced from Eurasia as a cultivated plant. Although not as invasive as Himalayan blackberry, evergreen blackberry does take over native vegetation. It spreads both vegetatively and by seed, spreading in the same manner as does Himalayan Blackberry. The seeds remain viable for a long period of time and are spread primarily by animals. It grows in a wide variety of habitats and soil types, and does especially well in disturbed sites.



DESCRIPTION: Evergreen blackberry is a semi-erect shrub, growing to 10 feet in height. The stems are generally biennial, bear fruit in their second year and grow from perennial rootstock. As the name implies, the leaves are evergreen. Each leaf has five leaflets, which have very divided edges, quite different than the leaves of the other blackberries. The leaves are green on both sides, hairy on the underside, and the plant is well armed with thorns. The flowers are white to pink and the berries are black. As with Himalayan blackberry, evergreen blackberry reproduces both vegetatively and by seed. It produces numerous suckers and the stems will root upon touching the ground. After disturbance, evergreen blackberry usually sprouts vigorously.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Same as for Himalayan blackberry.

TRAILING BLACKBERRY

THREAT: As a native plant, trailing blackberry is part of the natural flora of Whatcom County. It can be a nuisance to landowners but is not as aggressive as the introduced species and is not a threat to other native plants.

DESCRIPTION: Trailing blackberry is a low-growing, trailing or climbing shrub, often found in wooded areas. It is an evergreen plant, which can grow 15 to 20 feet in length and form mounds. The stems are green when young, turn brown as they mature, and are densely covered with thorns. It is a much less robust plant than the two introduced species, with much thinner stems. The leaves are composed of three leaflets, which are generally more elongate than those of the Himalayan blackberry. They are green in color, lighter green on the underside, and alternate. The flowers are white to pink and the berries are black, although smaller in size than the two introduced blackberries. Trailing blackberry reproduces by seed, by suckers and by rooting at nodes on the trailing stems. The seeds are spread by animals. This plant tolerates a wide range of site conditions and sprouts readily after fire. Trailing blackberry quickly established on mudflows and other harsh sites after the eruption of Mt. St. Helens.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: As trailing blackberry is a native, there should not be too much need to control this plant in natural situations. If control is desired, management options are the same as for Himalayan blackberry.