



URBAN WEED PROFILE

PRIVET (*Ligustrum* spp.)

WHY IS PRIVET A PROBLEM?

Privet is one of the most common hedge plants in New South Wales and is widely planted in parks and gardens around Wagga Wagga as an ornamental. Unfortunately, it is known to escape from cultivation and invade **urban bushland reserves, pastures, wastelands**, the edges of **watercourses** and **roadsides**.

Privet is known to out-compete native flora. Invasion of bushland by privet severely reduces natural plant diversity and may destroy habitat for native fauna.

HOW DOES PRIVET SPREAD?

Mature privet plants can produce up to **10 million seeds** in a single season. Some local wattles, by comparison, may only produce a few hundred seeds. This gives privet a huge advantage.

Privet produces **fruits** (see over) that are very attractive to birds. Birds carry the seeds away from gardens and deposit it in their natural territories. This allows privet to invade bushland.

Privet plants can be very **long-lived** (maybe 50-100 years) and will produce hundreds of millions of seeds in their lifetime. Populations that have become established can be very hard to shift because of the large number of seeds remaining in the soil.

Privet can also be spread by the **dumping of garden waste**.

WHERE IS PRIVET FOUND?

Notable infestations occur on Willans Hill and by the surrounding roads (e.g. Mimosa Dr.). It also occurs as a hedge around disused areas (e.g. Shaw St.), where it can be very prolific. It is common in gardens in Lake Albert, and has escaped into Rawlings Park.



Broad-leaf privet flowers. *Photo: Elissa van Oosterhout.*

IDENTIFYING PRIVET

Two species of privet are seen around Wagga Wagga. Both species are evergreen, and produce clusters of small white or cream flowers. Broad-leaf privet is more common.

Broad-leaf privet: shrub or small tree, 4 to 12 m tall.

Leaves:

- Oval-shaped, pointed.
- 4-13 cm long by 3-6 cm wide.
- Upper surface dark green, glossy; under surface paler, with prominent veins.

Fruits:

- Clusters of small "berries". Green at first, maturing to black or purple-black.
- Usually contain two oval-shaped seeds.

Chinese (or small-leaf) privet: shrub usually less than 3 m tall, occasionally to 5 m.

Leaves:

- Oval-shaped; may or may not be pointed.
- 1-7 cm long by 0.5-3.5 cm wide.
- Both surfaces dull green; under-surface densely hairy.

Fruits:

- Clusters of small "berries". Green at first, maturing to purple or blue-black.
- Usually contain two oblong seeds.

SIMILAR SPECIES

A number of native plants can be mistaken for privet, including sweet pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*), lilly pilly (*Acmena smithii* and *Syzygium* spp.), and grey myrtle (*Backhousia myrtifolia*). These species do not occur naturally near Wagga, but may occasionally be confused in cultivation.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE PRIVET?

Privet plants should be removed in order to prevent the spread of seeds. Plants may regenerate from surviving root material, so chemical control (by stem injection or cut-stump application) is advised. For more information, consult the DPI website. Plants should also be replaced by non-invasive alternatives.

ALTERNATIVES TO PRIVET

Many shrub and tree species make for excellent hedges. The following list is by no means exhaustive, and should be regarded as a guide only. The success of a hedge plant depends on many factors, including the location of the planting, the desired height, and the owner's pruning habits. It is always wise to ask questions before purchasing to establish the suitability of the species in question. All species listed here are water-wise and are unlikely to become invasive.

Exotic

- Small-leaf photinia (*Photinia x Fraseri*)
- Mexican orange (*Choisya ternata*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) and prostrate rosemary (*R. lavandulaceus*)
- Escallonia (*Escallonia rubra*)
- Diosma (*Coleonema pulchrum*)
- Box-leaf privet (*Ligustrum undulatum*; considered a non-invasive privet).



Broad-leaf privet fruits. Photos: John Hosking.

Native

- Native rosemary (*Westringia longifolia*) and coastal rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*) .
- Hop bush (*Dodonea viscosa*)*
- Rock thryptomene (*Thryptomene saxicola*)
- Rosemary grevillea (*Grevillea rosmarinifolia*)*
- Bottlebrushes (*Callistemon* species).

*Occurs naturally near Wagga.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For additional advice on identifying and controlling privet, consult the following resources:

- **New South Wales Department of Primary Industries weed profile** [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/pests-weeds/weeds/profiles/privet].
- **Weeds Australia** [<http://www.weeds.org.au/>] and **Weeds in Australia** [<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/>]



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