

Don't let them get away!

Invasive weeds are most effectively controlled when they and their numbers are small – a little weed control work today will save many dollars and days of work in years to come. As the area infested by heather in Tasmania is still quite limited, now is the time to take action!

Control that weed!

Control methods for heather include physical removal, the selective application of herbicides and ongoing monitoring. The best solution will depend on the infestation. Extreme care must be taken disposing of plants as heather has the capacity to spread rapidly from seeds.

Pulling out individual plants is generally not recommended, as the plant can resprout from broken root fragments, and also readily re-establishes from the soil seed bank.

Slashing of mature plants is also likely to exacerbate the problem, and may lead to heather being spread further afield on contaminated machinery.

As this weed is limited in distribution and easily spread, it is recommended that you **do not try to control it by yourself**.

The best solution for your site will vary with the type and intensity of infestation – for advice and more details on control methods and disposal contact the Southern Regional Weed Management Officer at DPIPWE on 1300 368 550 or consult the DPIPWE website (www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au/weeds).

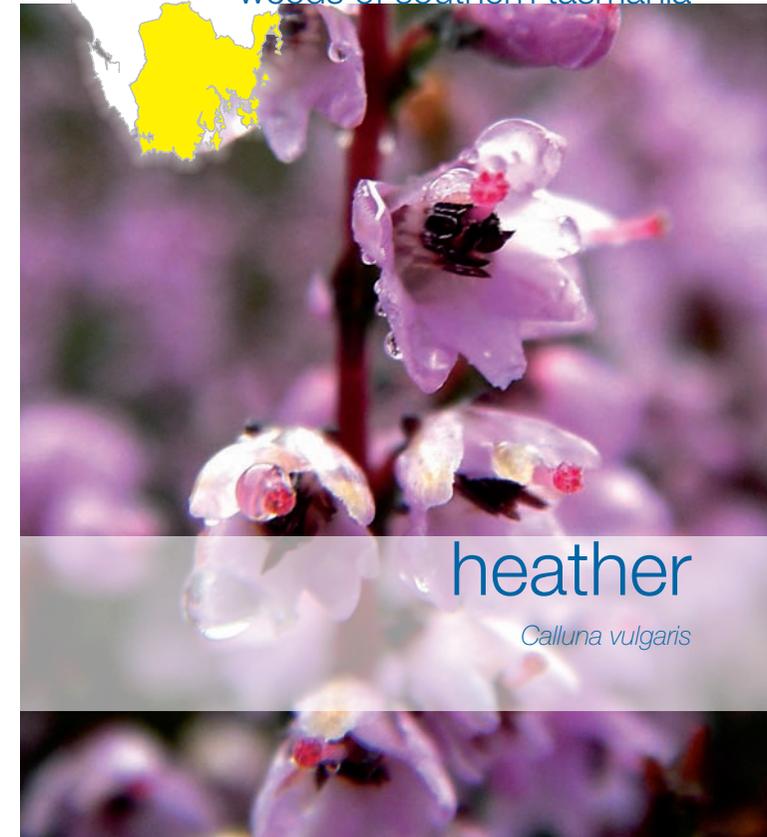
Do the right thing

Weed waste dumped in bushland or local reserves gives pest plants a leg-up into new areas. Do the right thing, and dispose of your weed waste responsibly.

Weeds are easily spread by contaminated machinery and people – check your clothes, shoes and vehicles for soil or plant matter that could be carrying weedy plant seeds.

Get informed

Heather is a significant weed threat for Southern Tasmania, and it is important that new populations are reported. If you believe you have discovered an infestation of this weed contact DPIPWE on 1300 368 550.



Impacts

Biodiversity, agriculture and fire risk

Current distribution in Southern Tasmania

Isolated populations: known from Kingborough, including Bruny Island (Alonnah and Lunawanna), Kingston and Blackmans Bay areas



weed warning

heather



Background

Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) has been present in Tasmania since at least 1899, where it is first mentioned in a nursery catalogue. Although associated with Scotland, heather's native distribution spreads throughout much of Europe, and extends as far south as northern Africa. Heather is now on the national Alert List for Environmental Weeds.

Within Australia, Tasmania is the only state in which heather has become naturalised. It was first noticed escaping from gardens around Kingston and on Bruny Island in the 1960s. Infestations of heather also existed in the Central Highlands, where it is thought to have been grown by homesick Scots working on the hydro-electric schemes in the 1920s.

Heather is a highly adaptable plant, capable of growing across a broad range of altitudes, soil types and environmental conditions. It is considered to be a particular threat to Australia's sensitive alpine regions.

Each plant can produce thousands of seeds annually, and it is possible that individual seeds may remain viable for up to one hundred years. These seeds are tiny and easily spread, and once heather becomes established in an ecosystem, it is capable of rapid growth which can quickly out-compete all native plants within the area. Heather infestations are promoted by fire, which encourages seeds in the soil to sprout profusely, allowing this plant pest to gain even more ground.

As the distribution of heather in Australia is still very limited, it is considered quite feasible to eradicate it from the country.

Get a positive ID

Heather generally grows as an evergreen, upright shrub between heights of 20-70cm, although in some circumstances, it can take on a scrambling habit. Young stems are densely covered in fine hairs, and bear small dark green leaves (1.5-3.5mm long), which turn brown as they age, and grow in four vertical rows up the stems of the plant. New leaves and shoots are produced from spring through autumn.

Heather can form flowers at any time of year. Its flowers are generally a purplish-pink, although they may range in colour from white through pink to purple. Each bell-shaped flower has four petals, and the flowers grow on leafy stalks. Seeds of this plant are tiny (0.5mm), reddish brown, and produced in their thousands.

Some people find that heather resembles some of the small Tasmanian native heaths like pretty epacris *Epacris impressa*. Unlike any of the native heath species, heather has soft foliage, and its flowers have distinct petals, rather than the tubular-bell-shaped flowers seen on the native heaths.

If you believe you have found a specimen of *Calluna vulgaris* collect a sample of it in a sealed bag and contact your local Council officer or a DPI/PWE representative.

Weed management – it's your responsibility

Many people unwittingly harbour pest plants in their gardens – some even actively grow them, knowing nothing of their weedy ways. Although not currently widespread in Tasmania, heather may have already made its way onto your land.

This plant is a declared weed under Tasmania's *Weed Management Act 1999*. It is your responsibility to control heather on your land. Failure to remove it from your property could result in legal action. It is also illegal to distribute the plant or its seed in any way, whether as cut flowers, in contaminated feed, on livestock or on dirty equipment.

Although prohibited, heather may occasionally be found for sale in nurseries or at local markets. Please report any such occurrences to the DPI/PWE.

If you do have heather growing in your garden, there are many beautiful, similar looking native heaths that can be used to replace it. Ask your local native plant nursery for advice on what to grow in your area.

Weeds are a growing problem.

Act now – make a plan and make a start!

Images:

1. The bell-shaped flowers of *Calluna vulgaris*
2. Leaves and stem