

## Beware the cleavers' hooked hairs

By **PETER TUCKER**  
**Bush For Life**  
**Technical Officer**

**Cleavers (*Galium aparine*) is generally a weed of disturbed areas. It tends to be more frequent in native vegetation of roadside verges than larger reserves or similar.**

Considering only 28% of Bush For Life sites occur on roadsides it may not be a common weed for all Bush For Life volunteers.

However, this weed is frequently transported by animals so could appear in any patch of bushland, for example it is a problem on the Bush For Life site at Mt Bold on SA Water land, which has been grazed by cattle in the past.

It can easily grow unnoticed in suburban gardens, so we could inadvertently spread it to bushland on our clothing.

Cleavers is one of those plants that goes unnoticed everyday, but once you are familiar with it, you seem to see it everywhere. It's an odd looking plant, just long stems with a few whorls of leaves every few centimetres.

Cleavers is an annual plant, dying each year around summer time, once it has produced copious amounts of seed.

Cleavers has stems up to 1m long, sometimes longer.

The stems appear to be square in cross section, due to four distinct ridges running along each stem.

The 'leaves' (a mixture of true leaves and stipules) are of equal length, approximately 2-7cm, and radiate out from the stem in a whorl.

There are usually six leaves per whorl, but can have up to eight. Flowers are very small and white, emanating from the point where the leaves join the stem. The flowers are usually in groups of 2-3 on fine stalks.

The key feature of cleavers is that almost every part of the plant is covered with tiny hooked hairs.

This plant can stick to anything! The hooked hairs make the plant feel rough, like fine sand paper.

Clearly, this is how the plant gets distributed around the place, sticking to animal's fur, machinery and our clothing. **Always** make sure you are not an agent of spread.

Check your clothes for **any** weed seeds or other material before leaving for your Bush For Life site, **and** before going home.

If conditions are right, this weed can come to completely dominate the understorey of a patch of bush.

I have seen roadsides where there is no other plant in the understorey! Cleavers also loves disturbance.



**THEY'RE EVERYWHERE:** Cleavers is one of those plants that goes unnoticed everyday, but once you are familiar with it, you seem to see it everywhere. Cleavers is not a difficult weed to kill in bushland, but it is best to deal with them before the stems get too long. (Left photo courtesy of Broadleaf Weed Seedlings (of Temperate Crops and Pastures) by JJ Dellow; NSW Department of Primary Industries).

### But aren't there native *Galium* species too?

While there are five native *Galium* species (and five weed species) in the Southern Lofties Botanical Zone, their leaves are much smaller than cleavers.

Several species do have fine hooked hairs, but they are much finer than cleavers and do not stick to clothing or skin as readily. All native *Galium* species have leaves less than 1.5cm long, cleavers leaves are usually 2-7cm long. As with all new plants you encounter on your Bush For Life site, seek confirmation and guidance from your Regional Co-ordinator, take a specimen or photograph and add it to your herbarium.

### What's to be done with it?

Cleavers is not a difficult weed to kill in bushland. It is best to deal with it before the stems get too long.

As with all bush regeneration, begin where the weed is fewest. Devoting all your time to an infestation will just lead to chasing your tail in the future.

If no natives are present, all that will replace the cleavers you have treated will be more cleavers or

possibly a more difficult to control weed.

Become familiar with this plant and confident with identifying it. Now just carefully hand-pull the cleavers, being very careful not to disturb the soil, encouraging more to germinate. That's about it.

Make sure the roots of pulled plants do not come in contact with the ground as they may continue growing. If the plants you pull have flowers or fruits on them, you will have to bag the cleavers and remove from the site. Dispose of them in your Council rubbish collection or solarise them in black plastic bags for several months. Due to cleavers ability to climb over native vegetation spraying with herbicide should be avoided.

Before leaving your Bush For Life site, make doubly sure you are not carrying any weed seeds on your boots, other clothing or on your vehicle.

**The key feature of cleavers is that almost every part of the plant is covered with tiny hooked hairs. This plant can stick to anything!**

## 2006 Bush For Life workshops

<b>Cherry Gardens</b>	<b>Saturday, July 1</b>
<b>Strathalbyn</b>	<b>Wednesday, July 19</b>
<b>Mt Barker</b>	<b>Saturday, August 5</b>
<b>Gawler</b>	<b>Saturday, August 12</b>
<b>Harrogate</b>	<b>Saturday, August 19</b>
<b>Playford</b>	<b>Wednesday, August 30</b>
<b>Salisbury</b>	<b>Saturday, September 2</b>
<b>Auburn</b>	<b>Wednesday, September 13</b>
<b>Victor Harbor</b>	<b>Wednesday, September 20</b>
<b>Blewitt Springs</b>	<b>Wednesday, October 4</b>
<b>Belair</b>	<b>Saturday, October 14</b>

\* workshop dates and locations subject to change

\* When booking in for workshops, please quote the course code B1.

**To book into the workshops below you must have completed a Bush For Life workshop first**

### Plant Identification

<b>Mt Barker</b>	<b>Saturday, October 7</b>
<b>Belair</b>	<b>Saturday, October 21</b>

### Grass Identification

<b>Mt Barker</b>	<b>Saturday, November 4</b>
<b>Mt Barker</b>	<b>Saturday, November 18</b>

### Grassy Ecosystem Workshops

<b>Belair</b>	<b>Tuesday, June 20</b>
<b>(Broadleaf herbicides &amp; Bridal Creeper)</b>	
<b>Belair</b>	<b>Tuesday, August 29</b>
<b>(Slashing)</b>	

**Workshops fill fast. Phone 8372 0150 to book your place.**