



Autumn weed control on woody weeds

Often when the end of summer and early autumn approaches there is limited opportunity for bush regeneration activities.

Bridal creeper is usually inactive, just biding its time for a few more months before it wreaks havoc on our native bushland.

Annual weed grasses and herbs won't be around for some time as they too are biding their time for cooler, wetter months ahead and of course those horrible and ugly weedy bulbs are doing the same.

At this time of year our attention is drawn to some rather unsavoury characters; woody weeds. I'm sure you are familiar with the usual suspects.

I am going to concentrate on some of the larger woody weeds, particularly those that remain green all year round, ie don't drop their leaves and become dormant over winter.

Deciduous woody weeds have to be treated in spring.

In the past, most Bush For Life volunteers have used the cut and swab (or now cut and dab) technique to treat woody weeds or relied on Councils with chainsaws and the like.

There is a more appropriate technique for minimum disturbance treatment of these weeds – it is called drill and fill.

Many carers will be familiar with this, particularly if you attended a workshop last year or have been on some of our BAT outings.

Drill and fill is quite simple to administer and extremely satisfying, but there are areas where mistakes can easily be made.

A planned strategy is essential

Like all weeds in bushland, start where the target weed is least dense. Spot regeneration may also be a reason to mark a particular weed for a termination.

For example, large olives under mature eucalypts can seriously inhibit the eucalypt's survival by



A dead African buckthorn at Cobbler Creek, which had been drilled and filled by David Mitchell, President of Trees For Life. Photo by Peter Tucker.

taking valuable soil moisture at the most stressful time of year.

Once a strategy is formed, beware not to target too many large weeds in one year unless you have the time to do the follow-up work the next year.

Just think about removing thousands of young woody weeds for the next few years of your life due to prolific germination of weed seed!

As drill and fill is so easy to administer we sometimes need to curb our desire to destroy all woody weeds from our site, however if this happens to you don't be afraid to ask for help, we may be able to organise a special BAT attack for your site.

The drill thrill

A cordless drill is used to drill a steeply angled hole into the plant's cambium layer (where sap flows just beneath the bark layer) as close to the base of the plant as possible.

This is where the most common mistake is made.

It is essential for the hole to be steeply angled into the cambium otherwise the herbicide will not be absorbed into the sap flow.

Use a 6 – 10mm drill bit, the choice is yours, remembering a large bit will use more power from the battery but allow more herbicide to be applied.

The hole is then immediately filled with concentrated Glyphosate™ 500 rather than 360.

Some people use large veterinarian syringes to administer the Glyphosate™ (although the needle is not necessary) with the appropriate chemical resistant gloves of course.

This is repeated every 2.5 – 5cm until the base of the plant has been circled. Sometimes when it is not possible to completely circle the plant, make two rows where you have access to the base of the plant.

Usually the plant drops its leaves within six weeks and dies within a few months.

It is necessary to monitor the plant and if it resprouts the process needs to be repeated.

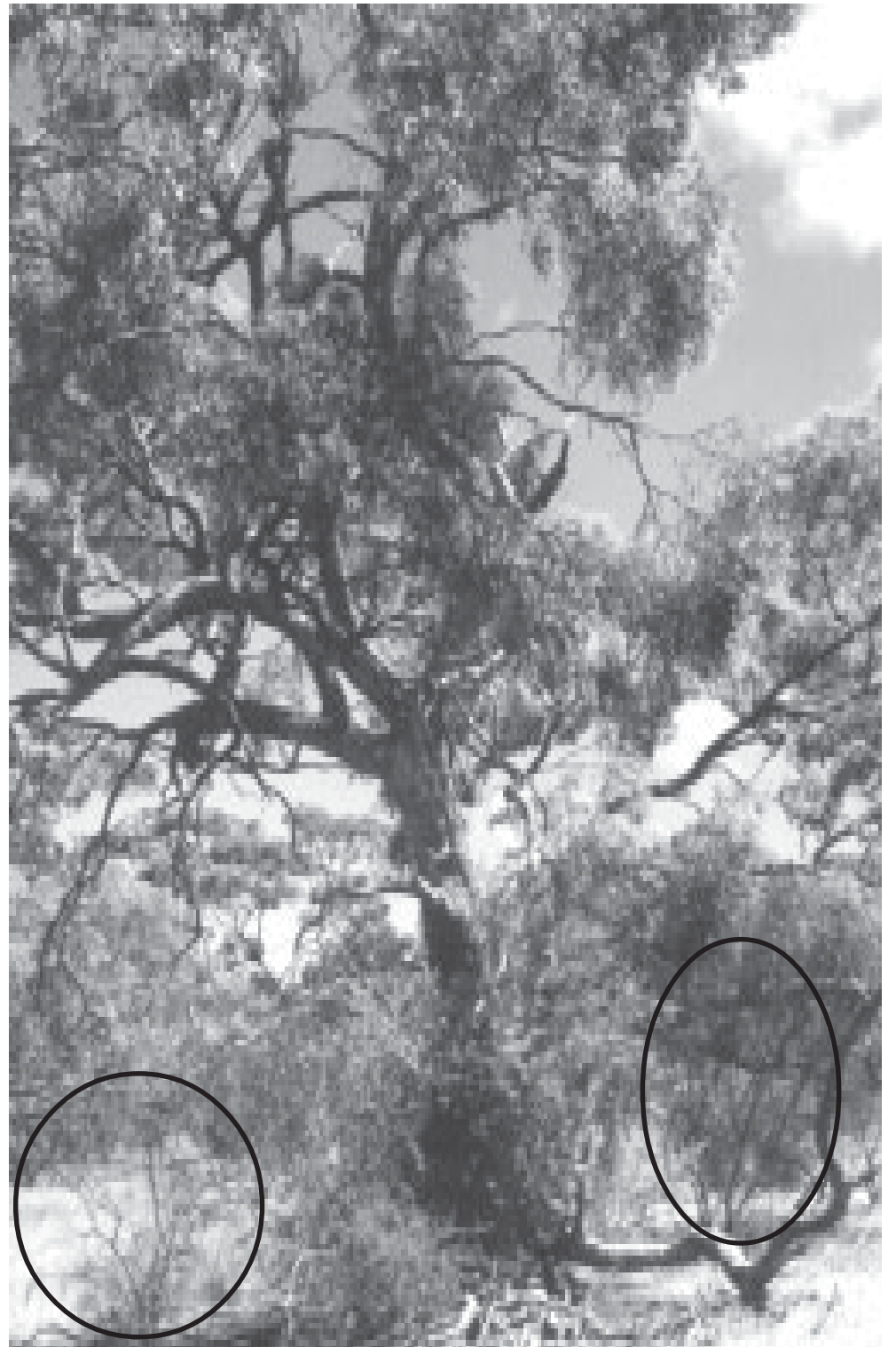
Don't forget to use a rather off-putting maniacal cackle upon afflicting a weed with certain death. He he he he hah hah hah he he he.

This has been proven to seriously offend and demoralise unwanted weeds. (Although no scientific proof yet exists – Ed.)

I mentioned earlier that the death of a large woody weed could lead to a massive germination of weed seedlings.

These seedlings will have to be removed, but it may be more efficient to remove them the following autumn as many should die over the summer months.

If you don't have access to a cordless drill Trees For Life have drills that Bush For Life volunteers can borrow. Call the office to arrange collection.



An example of spot regeneration: *Eucalyptus porosa* under threat from the olive trees at its base. The growth at the front is a live olive tree and two dead olive trees are circled. Photo by Peter Tucker

A large dead weed can be useful

There are some very important advantages in using drill and fill, one of these is that the dead plant remains standing and continues to provide valuable structural habitat to native birds, especially if they are nesting in it, and other wildlife.

Another advantage is that disturbance to nearby native plants and soil is negligible.

When a chainsaw is used no structure remains and typically damage is done when the tree falls or as large pieces are dragged through bushland.

The most common weed to be administered the drill and fill treatment is the olive.

This technique has worked on some very large specimens but we should be mindful not to use it if the olive is developing fruit. Sometimes wild olives are harvested.

Wait until after this has occurred or the fruit has dropped or been taken by birds.

If the plant is large, one more year of fruit on the ground will be inconsequential.

It is interesting to note that four or five years ago we would have been laughed at if we said we could kill a large olive with Glyphosate™.

To date I have had success using this method on olives, buckthorn, pincushion hakea, smaller pine trees, golden wreath wattle and African boxthorn.

I'm sure others have been successful with different woody weeds.

Remember, if the weed is deciduous like desert ash, willow or hawthorn, drill and fill will be more effective in spring when sap flow is more vigorous.

Leave them until then and don't forget, the hole must be made at a very steep angle!

Peter Tucker
Bush For Life Officer

