Special seeds help weeds to spread

Robert Dunlop Royce
IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

This document has been obtained from DAFWA's research library website (researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au) which hosts DAFWA's archival research publications. Although reasonable care was taken to make the information in the document accurate at the time it was first published, DAFWA does not make any representations or warranties about its accuracy, reliability, currency, completeness or suitability for any particular purpose. It may be out of date, inaccurate or misleading or conflict with current laws, polices or practices. DAFWA has not reviewed or revised the information before making the document available from its research library website. Before using the information, you should carefully evaluate its accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance for your purposes. We recommend you also search for more recent information on DAFWA's research library website, DAFWA's main website (https://www.agric.wa.gov.au) and other appropriate websites and sources.

Information in, or referred to in, documents on DAFWA's research library website is not tailored to the circumstances of individual farms, people or businesses, and does not constitute legal, business, scientific, agricultural or farm management advice. We recommend before making any significant decisions, you obtain advice from appropriate professionals who have taken into account your individual circumstances and objectives.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Agriculture and Food and the State of Western Australia and their employees and agents (collectively and individually referred to below as DAFWA) accept no liability whatsoever, by reason of negligence or otherwise, arising from any use or release of information in, or referred to in, this document, or any error, inaccuracy or omission in the information.
SPECIAL SEEDS HELP WEEDS TO SPREAD

R. D. ROYCE, Officer in Charge, Botany Branch

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a plant which establishes it as a weed is that it serves no useful purpose under the circumstances in which it occurs.

Thus the most beautiful of garden plants growing in the middle of a pasture paddock would be classed as a weed, while the very useful and widely cultivated fodder plant veld grass is a very serious weed in King's Park.

Weeds vary considerably in seriousness, and to a very large extent this is measured by the aggressiveness of the species—how successfully it can compete with other plants, both crop and weed. The more aggressive plants, when viewed on a State-wide basis and with emphasis on rapidity of spread, are those which are capable of setting and distributing large numbers of seeds.

"Parachute" Seeds

The thistles are outstanding examples of this type of plant. It is very seldom that any of the fertile flowers produced by the many species of thistles fail to set seed. This means that each flower head is capable of forming up to 30 or 40, perhaps even more, viable seeds. In many cases each is equipped with a pappus which acts like a parachute and enables the seed to glide in the wind for great distances away from the original infestation before settling to the ground. It is easy to see that these species colonise large areas very rapidly if nothing is done to prevent the established plants from flowering and seeding.

Other relatives of the thistles have developed modifications which are just as effective as is the pappus, in aiding the spread of the plants.

Spiny Burrs

These are the hard fruiting structures of Bathurst burr and Noogoora burr. The seeds of these plants are enclosed in firm almost woody burrs. From the outer surface of these burrs are developed numerous slender spines with sharply hooked apices which enable them to adhere very strongly to most objects which may come in contact with them. Sheep are probably the chief agent of distribution but sometimes it is cattle or dogs. Even clothes worn by human beings are effective in providing these plants with what might be termed a "hook hold," and the burrs may then be carried for long distances. Incidentally, they are often found by quarantine officers on sheep imported from other States.

Succulent Berries

Another effective means of ensuring a wide distribution, is that seen in the blackberry, in which the seed is embedded in a succulent berry. The ripe fruit is readily eaten by birds and other animals, and the hard seeds pass through the body unharmed. Thus new infestations may be started many miles from the original plant,