

**The origins of environmental weeds** are mostly outside Australia – chiefly Asia, tropical America and tropical and southern Africa. Most have been introduced as garden or parkland ornamental or shade trees, and this is still the largest source of new environmental weeds in our area and throughout Australia. Many of our environmental weeds have been (and some still are) desirable ornamental plants in gardens and parks. Others have been deliberately introduced as fodder plants or crops and have since escaped into environmental areas, whilst a few have been accidental introductions. No serious environmental weeds of our region have originated elsewhere in Australia. Of the many hundreds of exotic plants that have been introduced to our local gardens only a few have become significant environmental weeds.

**Naturalisation of exotic plants** must occur before they can become environmental weeds. They must be able to escape from gardens and invade, survive and spread in bushland without human assistance. Escape and invasion is usually either through the digestive systems of birds or by the wind, although some weeds get into bushland by thoughtless dumping of garden refuse. Survival without human assistance requires that they are competitive with the existing native plants, and they must also be able to reproduce and spread within the bushland either by seed or vegetative means.

Exotic plants always have one great advantage over local native plants – they have escaped from the insect pests and diseases that control them in their original areas of evolution. All of our native plants have suites of insects, diseases and other biological restraints on their growth, but exotic plants have escaped from these limitations by leaving their biological controls behind when they were brought to Australia. This often enables them to effectively compete with and thrive at the expense of native Australian plants.

**Most of the Region's environmental weeds occur in and around Toowoomba City.**

Toowoomba has many more gardens and parks than the rest of our Region and a moister and more temperate climate, allowing a greater number of exotic plants to escape and making it more suitable for their invasion and survival in bushland. The City also has a relatively greater area of remaining natural bushland close to gardens and parks than other parts of the Region. The greatest concentrations of environmental weeds always occur close to cities, towns and villages, and bushland parks in and close to urban areas are the most heavily infested, especially if they have been planted and cultivated as gardens or parks in the past.

**The control of environmental weeds** is usually very time consuming, since they have to be carefully and effectively removed without harming adjacent native plants. Local and state governments acquire bushland and national parks fairly easily, but generally lack the financial means to manage the weeds that invade them other by large scale and indiscriminate methods such as fire. This is where our community comes in. Our bushland parks belong to our communities, and local community volunteers are essential in keeping them reasonably weed-free. Since most of the serious environmental weed problems occur close to urban centers the problem and the solution are usually close together.

The Toowoomba Regional Council encourages and supports local community volunteers who are prepared to get out into their local bushland parks to manage and control environmental weeds. You can find out more about this from the Parks Community and Volunteer Support Facilitator at the Toowoomba Regional Council's Parks and Recreation Section.