

What is Weed Warriors?

Weed Warriors is an innovative national community engagement and empowerment program that is focused on fostering increased community awareness of, and involvement in, local weed issues.

The Weed Warriors program recognises children as the land managers of the near future and seeks to empower and engage them in weed issues through an on-going program of classroom and field-based activities. The activities are designed to take the program participants beyond knowledge to action and help to encourage a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, their natural environment. The program also focuses on linking stakeholders involved in weed management with the community.

What does the program involve?

As Weed Warriors, students become actively involved in the management of a local weed problem when they join with land managers and community groups to implement a biological control program for a target weed (biological control is the management of a weed using natural enemies from the weed's country of origin). The weed species targeted reflects weed problems that occur in the local area.

Through the program, students are given the unique opportunity to undertake real-life weed research at school. The students take on the role of weed scientists and their classroom becomes a mini research institute as they breed biological control agents to help control the target weed.

The breeding phase of the Weed Warriors program generally lasts four to six weeks. Throughout this time students are taught the skills needed to breed the biological control agents through the provision of resource material and through active participation in the process. Students, in collaboration with local land managers and community groups, then release their biological control agents at a weed infestation local to the school, playing an active role in bringing about a solution to a weed problem in the local community.

An important aspect of the Weed Warriors program is the establishment of mentor-student relationships; linking schools with key people that play a role in weed management, conservation or natural resource management in their local area.

The role of the mentors in the Weed Warriors program is to help increase the quality of the learning experience and to develop in the students a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, weed issues in their local area. Their involvement in the program helps to create a real-world experience for the students and assists them in developing a thirst for environmental knowledge.

Who does the program target?

The Weed Warriors program is adaptive to all levels of education. However, the program is most often targeted at years 3 to 6 in primary schools and years 7 to 9 in secondary schools.

What are the benefits of participating in the program?

Engage students in key learning areas

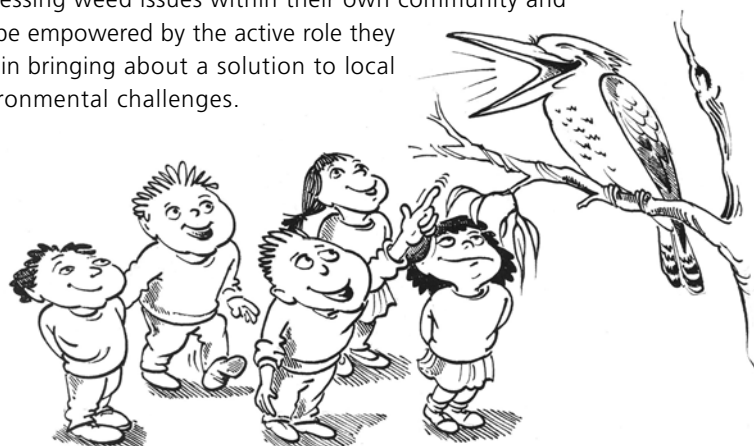
The Weed Warriors program helps teachers achieve teaching and learning outcomes in key areas across a broad spectrum of the syllabus in a self-directed and constructive learning situation that is fun and stimulating and in which all students can feel comfortable to explore, investigate and inquire. The Weed Warriors program is anchored into the curriculum framework for each state/territory.

Deliver challenging, innovative teaching and learning opportunities

The Weed Warriors program brings challenging new ideas into the classroom in a way that is meaningful to students and creates a learning environment that engages and empowers students within and beyond the classroom.

Empower students

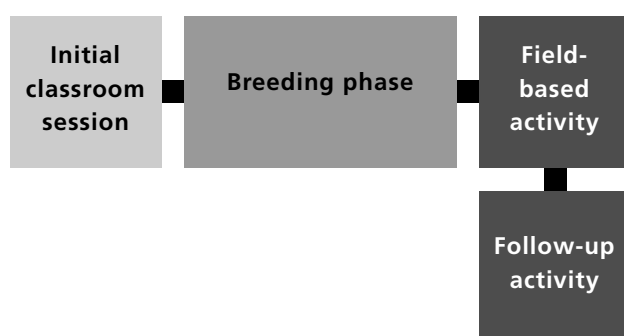
Students will make a valuable contribution towards addressing weed issues within their own community and will be empowered by the active role they play in bringing about a solution to local environmental challenges.



Develop strong relationships between students and members of their local community

Local land managers and community members will actively engage students and will strive to create a real-world experience for them. Mentors will help to inspire students and to foster a sense of connection to, and responsibility for, their natural surroundings.

How is the program structured?



Initial classroom session

Usually forty minutes duration

The initial classroom session is aimed at increasing the student's knowledge of weed-related issues, linked both to their local community and a wider context. The students are also introduced to biological control and the basic concepts behind it. Students are then taught the skills needed to breed the biological control agent for the target weed. The session is interactive and supported by visits from members of the local community and those who act as mentors to the students.

The breeding phase of the program

At least four weeks duration

During this time students become responsible for the breeding of the biological control agents and making basic observations about the biological control agent's life cycle and its impact on the target weed. Duties include watering and providing quantities of the weed to act as a food source. The biological control agents chosen for the program are highly visible in their impact and students are encouraged to measure their observable impact and report on what they find.

Field-based activity

Usually two hours duration

The field-based activity centres on the release of the classroom-reared biological control agents at a suitable weed infestation local to the school. Media attendance

at the event is encouraged as is attendance by parents and other interested parties. Through participating in the release event, students are given an opportunity to relate their classroom-based learning to a real-world experience.

Follow-up activity

Monitoring the establishment and spread of the biological control agents at the release site six or twelve months after their release is an important follow-up activity to the release event. There are two ways the students can be involved in monitoring the release site:

- Through active participation in another organised visit to the release site, or
- The Weed Warriors Key Contact monitors the site and reports findings back to the students in the classroom.

Support for the teacher

Personal support

A teacher participating in the Weed Warriors program is fully supported in organising and implementing the program by a Key Contact and, in some instances, a mentor or community group.

Who are Weed Warriors Key Contacts?

A Weed Warriors Key Contact is responsible for coordinating and implementing a Weed Warriors program within a local area.

The Key Contact is usually a person interested in engaging people in local weed issues and who has knowledge about the management of weeds and/or natural resources in the local area.

Often, a teacher will hear about the Weed Warriors program through the person who will become their Key Contact. Alternatively the school's interest in the program may precede the identification of a suitable Key Contact. In this case the National Weed Warriors Coordinator can provide help in identifying a Key Contact for the school.

Assistance provided by the Weed Warriors Key Contact

The Key Contact is responsible for:

- Assisting the teacher plan for the program,
- Helping provide the teacher with the resources and equipment necessary to run the program,
- Providing the expertise necessary to deliver the program,
- Helping to link the school with a mentor from their local community, and
- Being available for the teacher or students to assist them if they encounter any problems or difficulties.

Weed Warriors for teachers



Mentors

The role of the mentor is to maintain a connection to the students within and beyond the breeding phase of the program. Often, the Key Contact plays the role of mentor to Weed Warriors schools. Alternatively the school is linked with a local person or community group who will strive to nurture student knowledge of, and responsibility for, local weed issues.

Weed Warriors Teacher Resource

A teacher participating in the Weed Warriors program will receive comprehensive resources to assist in preparing for, and conducting, a Weed Warriors program within the classroom. Resources include:

- Background information on weeds,
- A range of weed-related classroom activities that are linked to the curriculum, and
- A biological control agent rearing manual which provides details on how to rear and release the biological control agent for the target weed.

Tasks for Weed Warriors teachers

Teachers engaging their students in the Weed Warriors program will need to:

Prior to the program

- Conduct a short pre-learning survey with students (The survey is provided in the Teacher Resource appendices).
- Ensure the availability of one lesson for the delivery of the Weed Warriors initial classroom session. The initial classroom session will be conducted by an experienced weed officer and/or mentor.

During the program

- Supervise students in the maintenance of the biological control agents for the duration of the program. This includes watering of the host plants, adding fresh plant material and removing dead or severely damaged plant material. Teachers might also be required to assist students in the collection of new plant material.

Field-based activity

- Conduct a short post-learning survey with students at the completion of the program (The survey is provided in the Teacher Resource appendices).
- Prepare the students for the field-based activity. This includes following school policies for student excursions.
- Supervise the students at the field-based activity.

Program wrap-up

- Encourage students to record, or present, their experiences with the Weed Warriors program through verbal, visual or written means.
- Encourage students to develop linkages with other Weed Warrior schools across Australia through the use of the Weed Warriors website and participation in the buddy-school system.

What level of teacher involvement is required for the program?

An average Weed Warriors program spans four weeks and requires a minimum five hours of teacher involvement. Teachers will need to allow:

Prior to the program

- Fifteen minutes to conduct a pre-learning survey with the students.
- Supervise the initial classroom session delivered by members of the Weed Warriors team.

During the program

- Thirty minutes per week to supervise the students in the maintenance of their biological control agents.
- Two hours at the end of the program for the field-based activity where the students release their classroom-reared biological control agents.
- Fifteen minutes to conduct a post-learning survey with the students.



Conducting additional activities

It is recommended that supporting weed-related learning opportunities are conducted with students prior to, and throughout, the Weed Warriors program. Student activities have been included in the Weed Warriors Teacher Resource that will be provided to teachers as part of the program.

Getting started – registration

Registration forms the entry point into the program. It is the responsibility of a Key Contact to register interested schools. The support provided to teachers by Key Contacts is central to the success of the Weed Warriors program, so schools without an identified Key Contact are discouraged from entering the program. If your school does not know a suitable Weed Warriors Key Contact, the National Weed Warriors Coordinator may be able to assist.

Accreditation

Weed Warriors is an accredited program. Upon successful completion of an initial Weed Warriors program, registered schools will receive official Weed Warriors accreditation, symbolised by a sign with an accreditation number unique to the school. Accredited schools and their Key Contacts receive access to a secure section of the Weed Warriors website and other special benefits.

Is there a cost for the program?

There is a fee charged to Key Contacts who register an initial Weed Warriors school. This cost includes a Weed

Warriors Starter Kit, and the resources and accreditation for one school.

Additional costs

This cost does not factor in the expense of purchasing the infrastructure required to rear the selected biological control agent or obtaining a colony of the biological agent itself.

The cost of the Key Contact's time and the costs associated with transporting students to and from the release site should also be considered. The costs of running the Weed Warriors program should be discussed between the school and their Key Contact.

The next step

If you are interested in becoming Weed Warriors at your school, reply to your Key Contact, who is the person who approached you about being involved.

If you are interested but do not have a potential Key Contact, please contact the National Weed Warriors Coordinator or, alternatively, complete and return the expression of interest form at the bottom of this page.

For more information

For more information please contact the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinator. Please refer to the Weeds Warriors website www.weedwarriors.net.au for contact details.

National Weed Warriors program – request for assistance

Name of school

School contact

Position

Postal address

State

Postcode

Telephone (BH)

Email

- I am interested in participating in the Weed Warriors program, but do not know a potential Weed Warriors Key Contact. Please assist*.

*There is no guarantee that a suitable Weed Warriors Key Contact can be found.

How I heard about Weed Warriors:

Suggestions for potential Key Contacts?

Please return to: National Weed Warriors Coordinator. Please refer to the Weed Warriors website www.weedwarriors.net.au for contact details

request for assistance