

Weed Warriors getting started

Before getting started

This information sheet addresses issues you may wish to consider before you register an initial Weed Warriors school. A checklist has been included to help guide you in the tasks that need to be undertaken before you can get started with the Weed Warriors program.

Selecting schools for Weed Warriors

Primary or Secondary

The first step in selecting a Weed Warriors school is to decide whether you wish to undertake the program in a primary or secondary school. The program is suited to both levels of education and both will benefit from inclusion.

Choosing the school

The criteria below can be used to assist in your decision on which school within your local area is the best choice to participate in the Weed Warriors program.

Environmentally active schools

There will be schools within your local area that have demonstrated a commitment to involving students in environmental initiatives, or who have displayed an interest in fostering interactive community-based learning opportunities within the curriculum.

Weed Warriors will often fit neatly into the aims and objectives of these schools. However, keep in mind that using this criteria for selecting the school may mean that the biological control release site may not be within walking distance of the school. Therefore, transportation to and from the release site will need to be organised.

Schools near weed infestations

Another option for identifying a Weed Warriors school is to make the choice based on the school's proximity to a suitable biological control release site.

Schools in your local area may be located close to private or public land heavily infested with the target weed or adjoining a bushland reserve. These schools are ideal Weed Warriors candidates.

You may like to conduct a schools weeds survey in your local area. Do some research and draw up a list of schools that are adjacent to, or within walking distance of, bushland or private land infested with the target weed that would be suitable for biological control. This list could form the basis of suitable Weed Warriors schools in your area.

Urban Schools

It is important to engage urban and peri-urban schools and their communities in the Weed Warriors program, even though their distance to a suitable biological control release site may pose a challenge.

Some options to overcome this challenge are:

- Developing linkages between urban schools and rural schools. Urban students can send their classroom-reared agents to the rural school who can release the biological control agents at a local weed infestation on their behalf. Students can then keep in touch to monitor the progress of the biological control agents,
- The field-based activity can be incorporated into the school's annual camp, or
- Urban school children can travel by bus to their nearest suitable weed infestation.

Choosing a target year level

Once a suitable Weed Warrior school has been identified, the decision on which year level within the school is best to participate is best made in consultation with the principal and relevant teachers.

As a guide the program is usually conducted with years 3 to 6 in primary school and years 7 to 9 in secondary schools. The information and activities in the Teacher Resource, that is provided as part of the Weed Warriors program, has been tailored to address the key learning areas and outcomes of these year levels.



Engaging the school

Secure the interest of the school

Gauge the willingness of potential schools to participate in the Weed Warriors program by approaching either the:

- Principal,
- Teacher of targeted year level, or
- Science, agricultural or environmental coordinator (if there is one).

This can be done informally through a telephone call, face to face or more formally through an invitation to participate sent in the mail. Be sure to follow-up your formal invitation with personal contact. An example of an invitation to participate has been included in this information sheet.

Information for teachers

An information sheet entitled Weed Warriors for teachers has been developed to provide schools with the information they will need. Send a copy of this information sheet to the school as a follow-up to your initial phone call or as an attachment to your formal letter.

Identifying a suitable weed to target

The most suitable weed with which to run the Weed Warriors program is one that is a priority in your local area (usually meaning that there is lots of it) and one which has a suitable biological control agent.

It is important to establish if the proposed target weed is the subject of an active enforcement or compliance program in your local area. The use of biological control on these types of weeds is generally only appropriate at infestations that compliment and fall outside the operation of compliance programs.

How do I find out?

If you are unsure about which weeds to choose, your local authorised weed officer or natural resource manager will be able to help. If you are still unsure about which weed to choose, contact the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinator who will be able to provide advice.

Identifying a suitable biological control agent

Not all weeds have biological control targeting them. Not all weeds have even been nominated as a target for biological control, meaning that research into their natural enemies has not been conducted.



Other weeds, even though they have been nominated as a target for biological control, may not have biological control agents that are suitable for rearing by the community. Such biological control agents are often technically difficult to rear, some are microscopic in size and require specialised conditions and/or equipment while others are invisible for most of the year and only have a short window of obvious visual activity.

How do I find out?

Information regarding the type of biological control agents approved for release in Australia can be found through an Internet search, by asking your local natural resource manager, authorised weeds officer or group facilitator or by contacting the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinators.

Websites

The following websites are good sources of information on the biological control agents currently approved for release in Australia:

www.dpi.vic.gov.au

www.weeds.org.au/target

Further information

Another source of information regarding suitable biological control agents is the agency involved in the coordination, research and implementation of biological control in your state or territory. This agency will vary depending on your location. Your local authorised weed officer or natural resource manager will be able to point you in the right direction.

Weed Warriors getting started

Timing and duration of the program

What time of year?

When to run the Weed Warriors program will be influenced by a number of factors, with perhaps the most important being the life cycle of the weed being targeted and the biological control agent being reared. For example some weeds such as bridal creeper die down over summer and actively grow throughout the cooler months. Obviously it would be impractical to run a bridal creeper Weed Warriors program in the hotter terms.

Program duration

A Weed Warriors program generally runs for at least four weeks. However the program duration can be longer or shorter. In some instances, Weed Warriors programs have run for three months. Plan for at least four weeks.

Where will you release your agents?

Before you register a Weed Warriors school, it is important to identify infestations of the target weed suitable for the release of biological control agents.

At this stage the information can be broad with the actual release point being confirmed at a later date. Detailed information on the selection of a biological control release site can be obtained from the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinator.

It is also vital to communicate with the land manager of the identified area to gain initial consent to biological control being implemented on that land. This is important as an agreement of cooperation form, has to be signed prior to the release of any biological control agent.

If an appropriate release site cannot be identified near your selected school then you may need to:

- Develop linkages with another school to help facilitate the release of the biological control agents, or
- Factor into the cost of your program the need to transport the students to and from the release site.

Selecting Weed Warriors mentors

Identifying people to perform the role of mentor and linking the students with active local community groups are important elements of a successful Weed Warriors program.



Mentors

An important aspect of the Weed Warriors program is the establishment of mentor-student relationships; linking schools with individuals or groups that play a lead role in environmental management in their local area.

Anyone with expertise, experience, passion or interest in environmental management in the local area will make excellent Weed Warriors mentors. You will probably already know of individuals or groups that are active in your local area that would be suitable for the mentor role. If you are not aware of individuals or groups a first point of contact could be your regional Landcare coordinator.

Community groups

It is also important to identify opportunities to link the Weed Warriors with local community groups, even if they are not involved in an official mentor role. Local community groups can play an invaluable role in nurturing the Weed Warriors sense of stewardship and helping to maintain their enthusiasm for, and participation in, weed management and other local conservation activities.

A good way of involving community groups is by asking for suggestions on potential local biological control release sites and inviting them to attend the field-based activity at which the students will release their classroom-reared biological control agents.

Engaging mentors/community groups

Secure their interest

Gauge the willingness of potential mentors/community groups to participate in the Weed Warriors program either informally through a telephone call, face to face or more formally through an invitation to participate sent in the mail. Be sure to follow-up your formal invitation with personal contact. An example of an invitation to participate can be downloaded from the Weed Warriors website.

Information for mentors/community groups

An information sheet entitled Weed Warriors for mentors has been developed to provide people with the information they will need. Send a copy of this information sheet to the potential mentors and community groups as a follow-up to your initial phone call or as an attachment to your formal letter.

Involving the biological control release site manager

The land manager responsible for managing the infestation where the students will release their biological control agents may also be a suitable mentor. They may be an individual private landholder, a public land manager such as a park ranger or they may represent a group of people such as a committee of management.

It is possible that the release site manager may not be the Weed Warriors mentor. However they will still be engaged in the Weed Warriors program through:

- Signing the biological control agreement of cooperation form,
- Participating in the field-based activity, and
- Monitoring the progress of the biological control agents at the release site.

Other considerations

Program infrastructure

To conduct a Weed Warriors program you will also need to acquire the appropriate infrastructure and material for the rearing of the selected biological control agents.

Please consider that you will need to source the following:

- A rearing cage to contain the biological control agent,
- A light source and timer,
- A starter colony of the biological control agent,
- A supply of the weed in the relevant form eg sprigs or potted plants,
- Rearing materials such as containers and drip trays, and
- Release materials such as mesh bags and ventilated containers.

The cost of these materials is not included in the price of registration or the provision of the Weed Warriors Starter Kit.

The cost of the Key Contact's time to organise and conduct the program and the cost associated with transporting students to and from the release site must also be considered.

If assistance in funding the program is required, the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinators can provide details of grant and sponsorship opportunities.

Getting the program started

After giving consideration to the topics covered in this information sheet, the next step is to complete and return a Weed Warriors registration and agreement form to the State or National Weed Warriors Coordinator.

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.

Essential additional information:

The following information is downloadable from the Weed Warriors website

- 1 Weed Warriors for Key Contacts
- 2 Weed Warriors for teachers
- 3 Initial registration form
- 4 Weed Warriors agreement form
- 5 Additional new school registration form

