

HIMALAYAN BLACKBERRY

Also known as Armenian blackberry

Rubus discolor

Rose Family (Rosaceae)



DESCRIPTION

This perennial shrubby vine is common in riparian woodlands, disturbed open areas, and along streams.

Himalayan blackberry forms mounds up to 10 feet tall, with arching or trailing, thorny stems that become woody and reach up to 40 feet long. These areas are often impenetrable. The canes (stems) are green to deep red, turning woody with age. The leaves are toothed or serrated along the edges and have a mat of fine hairs underneath that give a whitish appearance. Leaves on flowering stems have 5 leaflets. To distinguish Himalayan blackberry from the native species, look for hooked or curving thorns, 3–5 leaflets, and larger fruits that ripen later than the native blackberries. Native blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) has just 3 leaflets and fine prickles rather than single thorns. Thornless elm leaf blackberry (*Rubus ulmifolius* var. *inermis*) is another invasive blackberry species to look out for. This species is thornless and produces no fruits, only flowers.

REPRODUCTION

Himalayan blackberry reproduces in a variety of ways. It can spread vegetatively by rooting from the cane tips or from nodes along the canes, from rhizomes or root fragments, and from the root crown. Canes bear fruit in their second year and then die. Every year the crown produces new canes that replace the dead ones. White (or sometimes pinkish) flowers with 5 petals and many yellow stamens bloom from June to August. Bumblebees and honeybees pollinate the flowers. Edible berries ripen and turn black in August to

September. Seeds are viable and tend to be dispersed by mammals or birds whose digestive tracts scarify the hard seed coating and promote germination. Seeds germinate in the spring and fall, but can remain viable for several years. An individual plant can live 25 years.

IMPACT

Once established, the plant's dense mounds displace native vegetation by shading out light. Individual canes are relatively short-lived (2–3 years), so a build-up of dead canes and abundant leaf litter gradually increases the risk of fire. Himalayan blackberry reduces access to water for wildlife, degrades pasture, and is sometimes a nuisance to recreationists seeking access to natural areas.

KEY FACTORS

- u Stout thorns necessitate the use of leather gloves and protective clothing.
- u Abundant seed production.
- u Seeds viable for several years.
- u Fast-growing stems.
- u Resprouts from the crown and root fragments left in the soil.
- u Thrives in moist areas.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

- u Cut stems with loppers close to the ground. Dig out rootball with a Pulaski or shovel, and

remove as much of the root as possible. Interconnecting roots reaching over 30 feet long and 2–3 feet deep make pulling up *all* roots extremely difficult. Realistically, you should aim to remove the main rootball and the large lateral roots. Dense thickets and thorns also make working with blackberry labor-intensive and uncomfortable, so control may be feasible only in sensitive habitat or small infestations working from the outside in.

- u **Brushcut** the canes; use McLeods to clear the vegetation. The best time to do this is when flowers are in bloom but before the fruit sets. Cutting encourages new growth but may be effective if repeated over a number of years.
- u **Cut and treat.** Some practitioners cut stems to about 1 foot and treat stumps with 25–50 percent concentration of glyphosate immediately after cutting. Don't use herbicide on or near plants from which people may pick and eat the berries.

DISPOSAL

Transfer stems and roots to a site where they can be left to decompose, making sure that all berries have been removed. Alternatively, burn the debris or trim it into pieces small enough for bagging and disposal.

FOLLOW-UP

Regardless of the method used, follow-up is essential. Some land managers recommend immediate revegetation with quick-growing shrubs and trees, with periodic visits to the site to check for seedlings or regrowth. After you've removed the canes, one option is to hoe the soil or use a rototiller. This will clear out any roots, but is practical only for small infestations. Goats will also graze on younger plants.

INTERESTING FACTS

Native to Eurasia, Himalayan blackberry was introduced to the US in the late 1800s as a cultivated crop. The berries make great pies and jams!

Notes