

# WEED OF THE WEEK SERIES

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## Invasive Vines: Part Two



Last week I introduced you to invasive vines. In today's article, I will introduce you to a few more creepy crawlies of the botanical world.

One of our region's highest priority species just so happens to be a vine. Puncturevine is an invasive plant that has already impacted our region's tourism industry by invading the beaches and bicycling trails in Oliver, Osoyoos and Penticton, and more recently it's having an economic impact on our agricultural industry as it moves into ground crops and vineyards. It forms dense mats along road shoulders, vacant lots, beaches and unpaved parking sites, its stems reaching up to 3 metres (10 feet) in length. Puncturevine is one of those weeds that you want to take all efforts to ensure it does not move onto your property. If you are doing any landscaping, check your sources of fill and gravel, as this seems to be one of the most common means of introduction into a new area. I have mentioned this weed in a previous article, so I won't delve into further details here.

One of the most unique invaders in our region is a vine called parasitic dodder (*Cuscuta* spp), also known as strangleweed. As its name implies, this plant is a parasitic annual forb. There are five species of dodder in BC, and two of them are native species; the other three were introduced from Eurasia. The most distinguishing feature about this invasive plant is its slender, thread-like stems, which are bright orange and coil around its host plant, adhering with wart-like suckers. Dodder attacks many vegetables, forage crops (particularly alfalfa) and ornamentals. They can also parasitize many native plants from herbs to shrubs, although I have noticed a particularly close host relation with plants of the goosefoot family, particularly Russian thistle. The lifecycle of dodder is most intriguing. The seeds germinate in the soil and produce slender stems, which have a short time to make contact with a host plant before the seedling dies. The dodder twines around the host plant and develops suckers that penetrate the host, extracting food from it. The dodder then loses contact with the soil. Stems of the dodder proliferate, sometimes forming dense mats, and then tiny creamy white flowers and seed are produced. Small infestations can be hand pulled and bagged, while in agricultural settings, patches can be cut and burned. Unfortunately tillage alone is not an effective control tool. If you discover dodder on your property, thoroughly clean equipment, tools and footwear before leaving the infested area. Hay infested with dodder should not be bought or sold. Agricultural producers, home gardeners and nursery growers should be on the lookout for this devastating parasitic plant and take immediate action if the weed is found or suspected.

The Morning Glory Family (Convolvulaceae) includes many different invasive vines that are widely cultivated for their colourful funnel-shaped flowers. Because of their fast growth, twining habit, attractive flowers and tolerance for poor, dry soils, some morning glories are excellent vines for creating summer shade on building walls when trellised. However, in some situations, morning glories develop thick roots and tend to grow in dense thickets. They can quickly spread by way of long creeping stems. By crowding out, blanketing and smothering other plants, some species of morning glory have turned into a serious invasive weed problem. A more commonly occurring and equally invasive morning glory is field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*). Field bindweed, also known as creeping Jenny, is a white-flowered perennial with long, trailing, somewhat twining stems. This persistent perennial vine forms dense, tangled mats on the ground or climbs up shrubs and trees. Stems can grow in excess of 1.5 metres (5 feet) long, while roots can be over 6 metres (20 feet) long. Mature leaves are arrowhead-shaped and 2-6 cm long. Trumpet-shaped, white to pinkish-purple flowers bloom in summer, closing each afternoon and reopening the following day. Bindweed seeds remain viable in the soil for 20 years or more. Young plants generally begin producing seed in their second growing season. Seeds germinate throughout the growing season, but peak germination usually occurs mid-spring through early summer. Fragments of vertical roots and rhizomes can also form new plants. Shoots form from lateral roots, enabling a plant to spread more than 3 m in a growing season.

Control of field bindweed in an area cannot be accomplished with a single treatment or in a single season. This plant is very drought tolerant and once established is nearly impossible to eradicate. It is important to address new infestations when they are small, because spot control is the most effective and least expensive control technique. Hand weeding is only temporarily effective and is not recommended because field bindweed sprouts from root fragments left behind. In cultivated areas, deep plowing to turn the soil and expose the bindweed roots to the sun may be effective.

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For anyone who wishes to view Weed of the Week articles on the Internet, note the Direct Link to the Invasive Plant Program on the home page of the RDOS website [www.rdos.bc.ca](http://www.rdos.bc.ca). For more information on invasive plants, contact Lisa Scott, Invasive Plant Program Coordinator for the Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District at (250) 492-0237 or email [info@rdos.bc.ca](mailto:info@rdos.bc.ca)