How to transport and display weeds safely for public events and training activities

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Summary There is increasing use of live plant material in displays and training activities about weeds and invasive garden plants. This is particularly so for potential new and emerging weeds, where live plant material is important to assist with accurate identification of plants seldom seen. The propagation, collection, transport, staging and disposal of this weed material poses a serious threat and pathway for weed spread.

A number of techniques have been developed to minimise risk of weed spread and to ensure weeds arrive in good condition for exhibition. How do you transport 100 weeds in the back of a station wagon and get them to an event when it is 35°C? Do you need a permit to do this? These are the practical problems faced by weed extension officers around the country.

In Victoria, a manual has been developed for Weed Alert Contact Officers, which includes guidelines on the transport and effective staging of living weeds to make the biggest impact in a display.

Keywords Weed, invasive garden plant, transport, display, exhibit, hygiene, disposal.

INTRODUCTION
How often have you seen a display of weeds with wilted stems and flowers that are hardly recognisable? Have you wondered how they got there and how many seeds have fallen off along the way? What will happen to them after the display or event?

Staging an exhibit or display of weeds is a considerable undertaking and is not something that can be rushed. Before deciding to take on such an undertaking, there are a number of important considerations:
1. Is sufficient time available?;
2. Do you have the appropriate vehicle to collect and safely transport weed material?;
3. Do you have the approval and appropriate permit(s) to collect, transport, display and deposit those weeds that are declared noxious?; and
4. Do you have the patience, eye for detail and perfectionism for accurate labelling and good quality attractive displays?

What are the objectives of displaying weed material? Is it for identification or recognition training? Is it for an eye-catching display to attract passers by so you can engage them in conversation about the problem? Is it for a quiz? Your objectives will determine how you stage your display. Your objectives and the type and availability of weeds will also influence whether you use a permanent potted weed collection or cut material from the field.

These and the practical ‘how to’ considerations of collection, transporting, displaying and disposing of weed material are included in the Victorian Weed Alert Contact Officer Manual (Blood 2006). This manual has been developed as part of the Weed Alert program coordinated in Victoria by the Department of Primary Industries. This program targets potential, new and emerging weeds. Live plant material for training and display is used regularly as part of this program. With careful training, attention to detail, sufficient resources and time, weed material can be transported safely for display purposes.

THE VICTORIAN WEED ALERT CONTACT OFFICER MANUAL
The Victorian Weed Alert Contact Officer Manual (Blood 2006) includes many detailed guidelines on this use of plant material.

Collection and transport Some of the important considerations include appropriate choice of vehicles. For example, a utility vehicle with an open tray is not appropriate. A station wagon is more appropriate and with the right preparation, can carry up to a hundred different weeds without them wilting.

Careful collection and care of cut material can prolong their life in transit and while on display. The basic principle is the cutting and tying of bunches of weeds in the field, dampening and wrapping in newspaper and placement in buckets of water in the rear of the vehicle. The bunches in the rear of the vehicle are protected from direct sun by the use of concertina fold-out foil sun visors available from many car accessory stores, petrol stations or hardware stores.

If potted plants are being used, each pot should be placed in a plastic bag of sufficient height to cover the tallest foliage.

While plant material is in the vehicle, the air conditioner should always be on if the weather is warm and the vehicle at all times parked in the shade.

Moving plant material from the vehicle to the venue must be done with care and without rushing.
Particular care must be taken when moving through doorways to make sure that plant material does not hit the door rims or get crushed in closing doors.

**Displaying weeds** There are many staging techniques discussed in the manual. If plants are being placed on tables, avoid placing tables in front of hot windows or windy doorways.

Weeds can be arranged in a number of ways according to family, lifeform, flower colour etc.

Each potted plant should be placed in a clean saucer. Cut plant material should be placed in vases (e.g. plastic florist vases) two thirds filled with water or in buckets.

Unwrapping and placing bunches of weeds should be done with care to ensure all plant fragments are collected and placed in an appropriate garbage bag for safe disposal.

Careful labelling of weeds is very important to ensure they are correctly identified. The types of labels available are discussed in the manual. The final ‘fussing’ prior to the opening of the display is described and includes the final tidying up of the vases and weeds to ensure they look their best.

Security is an important consideration especially if there are collectable and hard to obtain invasive garden plants, such as aquatics, in the display. Plant theft can occur, particularly after-hours over a multi-day event. Strategies for dealing with this are included in the manual.

Techniques are also included for containment of weed propagules while on display while still allowing the plant to be visible. Other considerations include how to safely display poisonous and allergenic weeds and those with spines or other skin irritants.

Maintenance of the plants while on display is important to ensure they look their best. This includes watering, and spraying with water mist.

**Clean up** At the end of an event when everyone wants to get home in a hurry is the time when extra care needs to be taken. Despite being tired and eager to get home, attention to detail is crucial during the clean up and packing up stage.

Potted plants need to be rebagged and returned to the vehicle. The manual discusses the techniques for dealing with cut weed material that will be disposed of after the event. It also suggests techniques for dealing with the water from vases or buckets. All weed material needs to be accounted for and no fragments left on-site.

Clean up of labels, vases, buckets and other equipment is important for hygiene. So too is the vehicle clean up. Vehicle cleaning should be recorded in a dedicated logbook for such purposes, such as the WeedStop logbook (Department of Primary Industries 2005) in Victoria.

**CONCLUSION**

Weed displays with live plant material are very valuable. They assist people to recognise weeds, particularly potential new and emerging weeds. They can be visually attractive, attract audiences and open discussion about weed issues. People repeatedly say how important it is to have live plant material on display and for training. Plants in three dimensions are much easier to recognise.

It is possible to collect, transport and stage weeds safely if sufficiently trained staff have sufficient time to do it properly. The infrastructure and protocols need to be in place for housing potted plant collections, hygiene and disposal of weed material.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

These techniques (and broadened in the Victorian Weed Alert Contact Officer Manual) have been gained over 18 years working with the Victorian Government in the conservation and weed area. The author has staged many weed displays ranging from a few potted plants or a vase of weeds, to a display of over 150 species, to involvement in an award-winning exhibit at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show. As a trained horticulturist, the author observes the transport and staging techniques used in the nursery and florist industry. These have been adapted and new techniques developed for collecting and transporting weeds. Thank you DSE for providing project funds and DPI for providing support, in particular the Weed Alert team members.

**REFERENCES**


Department of Primary Industries (2005). WeedStop vehicle logbook. (Department of Primary Industries, Horsham, Victoria).