

## **PERTH GARDENS *threatened by* DIEBACK**

Perth residents could be unknowingly spreading the deadly plant disease dieback in their gardens by buying soil and garden plants from unaccredited garden nurseries or garden services, according to Perth Region NRM.

Plants sold at markets and garage sales or by unaccredited nurseries or landscapers potentially contain Phytophthora Dieback (also known as Jarrah Dieback or Dieback).

Dieback is caused by a water mould that attacks the roots of susceptible plants, limiting their uptake of water and nutrients and eventually killing them.

Once established, Phytophthora Dieback is very difficult to eradicate and is readily spread through the movement of infested soil during gardening activities.

Its establishment in home and public gardens increases the risk of its spread to neighbouring public and private gardens and bushland reserves.

Big quantities of plants, soils and mulches are used by local government in these areas, which may or may not be sourced from accredited suppliers.

The non-government natural resource management organisation Perth Region NRM has funded the Dieback Working Group since 2004 in an attempt to prevent the spread of the disease in the Perth region.

Perth Region NRM chairman Colin Heinzman said the disease now threatens nearly 45% of all native plant species and 50% of rare and endangered flora in the southwest of Western Australia.

Recent mapping of the Perth region funded by Perth Region NRM reveals that a significant portion of the Perth region is also affected by the disease.

“It is believed to be a bigger threat to Western Australia’s ecosystems than salinity and it has been estimated that the disease will cost Australia \$1.6 billion over the next 10 years,” Mr Heinzman said.

The Dieback Working Group is working in collaboration with the Nursery & Garden Industry Association of WA to further develop the industry best management plan to purchase disease free plant stock, soil and mulch through its nursery accreditation scheme.

With increased trade in plants both within Australia and across the country, it is important to have in place practical recommendations to improve early detection and management of these plant pathogens and allow swift responses in the event of an incursion within the nursery and garden industry, Mr Heinzman said.

Dr. Margy Clema, President of the Nursery & Garden Industry Association of WA said: “The program includes Association staff and team members from Murdoch University working with garden centres to enhance the hygiene protocols in all aspects of a garden centre’s operation.”

Mr Heinzman said Perth residents could do their bit for the environment and help stop the spread of dieback by ensuring they only bought soil and plants from nurseries which display the AGCAS and NIASA accreditation logo.

Also, people driving vehicles or machinery into dieback affected areas should ensure they wash down their vehicles after leaving the area to prevent the disease being spread.

“The impact of dieback on our forests and bushland is like a ‘Biological Bulldozer’, causing the death of many trees and wildflower species,” Mr Heinzman said.

This drastic loss of susceptible species affects the whole ecosystem, including native marsupials, birds and insects that inhabit the bush. In turn, non-susceptible plant species are adversely affected as secondary impacts follow.

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