

Your Levy At Work



Greenlife
INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA

Your levy has funded this success story

August 2026

How early weed management lifted plant quality and nursery efficiency at Natural Area

At a glance

Who this is for

Nursery businesses looking to reduce weed-related production losses, improve operational consistency and strengthen team capability through practical, disciplined weed management systems.

Why it matters

GrowConnex extension support helped Natural Area validate and refine its weed management practices, delivering measurable improvements in plant quality, staff efficiency and nursery presentation. By strengthening early intervention systems, improving species identification skills and maintaining disciplined site routines, the business reduced unproductive labour, eliminated key weed species from its production environment and created more consistent nursery outcomes.

By staying ahead of weed pressure rather than reacting to it, Natural Area has cut unproductive labour and lifted plant quality across its Western Australian business. With support from GrowConnex, the business eliminated Cud Weed (*Gnaphalium spp.*) and significantly reduced Liverwort (*Marchantia polymorpha*) from its production environment - freeing up staff and delivering real improvements in plant presentation and efficiency.

Natural Area is a Western Australian environmental business providing ecological consulting, contracting and horticultural services. Its operations span native seed and plant production, revegetation, bushland weed control, vertebrate pest management, ecological consulting and environmental construction projects for government, mining, utilities and landscape clients.

Building control through early intervention and disciplined systems

Natural Area established its current nursery four years ago on a clean site with low weed pressure to support its native plant production.

Since then, the business' approach to weed control has been focused on prevention, through regular scouting, consistent early regular treatment across all



**Hort
Innovation** NURSERY
FUND

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au

areas of the nursery, and efforts to limit weed entry pathways.

This includes consistent and timely manual and herbicide treatment schedules and reducing external weed sources to limit reinfestation risk, our strategy including the following key points:

- Early detection and treatment by scouting regularly allows for identification of any emerging infestations, which are triaged and addressed promptly by allocated teams.
- Ground weeds and perimeter areas of the nursery are managed at strict regular intervals.
- Weeds in stock and mother plants are removed promptly, with daily attention scheduled and all sections of the nursery addressed to completely weed the nursery every 1-2 weeks. Preventing weed seeds from developing and causing infestations and spread of weeds has been the key to effective and efficient weed control. Pre-emergent treatments are used where indicated.
- Good hygiene and quarantine practices are implemented to prevent introduction or spread of weeds.
- Practices are implemented to reduce the risk of weed establishment, such as targeted plant nutrition and growing media choices, and optimised irrigation practices.

"Our objective has always been to stay ahead of weed pressure rather than react to it," said Natural Area's Founder & Consultant, David Hancock.

"Once weeds establish in production areas, the workload increases dramatically," he said.

Managing high-risk species and improving identification skills

Some weeds cause far more damage than others. At Natural Area, two species have demanded close attention:

- Flick Weed (*Cardamine hirsuta*) - moves fast from seedling to seed set, creating a heavy workload if missed early
- Chain Weed (*Euphorbia* spp.) - tricky to identify due to variation in leaf shape and colour, making staff training essential. It also rapidly sets seed and needs early identification and removal

Getting the team confident in identifying these species early has been central to keeping control outcomes strong. All staff receive training to recognise the various weeds and how to prioritise the different weed species and growth stages. Dedicated plant quality and yield personnel oversee and manage the allocation of time and attention to each problem area.

"Some weeds are easy to miss if staff are not looking closely. Recognition, timing and attention to detail make a real difference in control outcomes," said David.

Extension support reinforcing best-practice outcomes

"Working with a GrowConnex extension officer gave us an outside perspective on our existing systems. The support confirmed the business was on the right track, helped sharpen monitoring and treatment timing, and identified practical opportunities to improve further," said David.

"The standout result was the significant reduction of Cud Weed (*Gnaphalium* spp.) from the nursery - achieved through targeted, consistent control and the confidence that came from external validation.



“In addition, Liverwort (*Marchantia polymorpha*) was also dramatically reduced by meticulous attention on water needs, to minimise overwatering; and identifying and addressing any Liverwort emergence immediately.”

Efficiency gains, improved quality and stronger team engagement

With weed pressure under control, the benefits have flowed across the whole operation. Staff are no longer diverted into reactive weeding, freeing capacity for more productive work and contributing to improved plant quality, better presentation and more consistent outputs. Most notably, the preparation of plants for dispatch is significantly more efficient, and the nursery team can feel pride in working with quality plants in a tidy nursery.

Positive customer feedback has followed, alongside stronger team engagement through clearer expectations and more structured daily routines.

Natural Area continues to keep weed management front and centre through regular scheduling, early action and a team that knows what to look for.



Looking ahead

Through regular monitoring, early intervention and a team equipped to identify emerging issues, the business continues to keep weed pressure low and production running efficiently.

David says external support has also played an important role in reinforcing best practice and identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

“The biggest change is that we are no longer constantly chasing problems. The nursery runs more efficiently, and the plants look better as a result,” he said.

GrowConnex is helping nurseries across Australia strengthen biosecurity and sustainable production through practical, on-farm advice and support.

For more information on accreditation and credentials, please contact the GrowConnex experts here: www.greenlifeindustry.org.au/talk-to-an-expert.

ENDS

The ‘Nursery sustainability and biosecurity preparedness’ (BY24004), funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery levy and matched by the Australian Government, is a horticulture initiative designed to support nurseries in strengthening biosecurity and sustainable production practices.