

the bush has regenerated up to the block of weeds.

The worst weed-infested areas are almost always located along boundaries, paths and at entrances to areas of bush. When faced by a typical wall of weeds on a boundary, resisting the temptation to overclear is not very hard. You have been looking at the weed area for years, telling yourself not to worry about it, so you have had plenty of time to adjust your mind to taking things slowly. But when all that is left to be weeded is one bad patch, it is much harder to be patient. You know that you can clear the patch quite quickly and easily, and complete the primary clearing of a whole big area. It is so easy then to succumb to temptation and overclear, weeding a larger area than native plant regrowth can colonise. I have seen this happen and, four years later, professionals were still paying the price in seemingly endless follow-up.

This does not mean that you cannot start work on a bad area until you have got rid of all the weeds right round it. We start nibbling away at it whenever and wherever we stabilise an area beside it. We poke in around its edges, making clearings as little as two metres in diameter, or we do 'spot regeneration' (see p. 28). We form peninsulas of weeds — even islands — to avoid creating weed-prone open spaces. Be particularly careful not to overclear the strips of bad weeds on the edges of roads and clearings (see p. 27).

At first, after an area is cleared, more exotics than natives germinate and we have to pull up a lot of weed seedlings. In the very worst places where there is not even reasonable tree cover, it may take a whole season for the natives to become dominant, but once they do, the effect is amazing. Just as we are beginning to wonder if the weeds are inexhaustible, the natives take over, and can become very thick on the ground. We have so often seen the disastrous effects of overclearing in similar areas, that even now, used as we are to our own results, we can hardly believe our eyes when we look at our little patches of fresh young natives, growing confidently, hard up against a solid wall of weeds.

In some bush reserves, there are sections cut off from the bush and dealt with too often by mattocks or poisons, where regeneration is almost impossible. Here planting local native trees, shrubs and grasses may speed the process and, if the ground is cleared using our tools and techniques, there may even be some native seedlings

germinating naturally. Sowing mixed native seed should also help. But I must admit I can never get as excited by seeing something sown or planted establish itself as by seeing the plants establish themselves naturally in response to our controlled weeding programme. This is true natural regeneration in all its beautiful variety.

It is possible to regenerate very bad areas without planting by bringing the good bush up to them. One such area, the size of a small house block was bulldozed to remove a large chicken run. The coops as well as the topsoil were taken away. By weeding the bush on the perimeter, native growth was stimulated and strengthened. The central area was checked for weeds; some blackberry which survived the bulldozer was removed. It was then mulched heavily in the centre tapering towards the edges to enable the ground covers to spread inwards. Relatively little maintenance was required and within two years the whole area was covered in healthy weed-free bush requiring infrequent maintenance.

Had the bush on the perimeter, however, not been moderately good, the spectacular transformation would not have been achieved in so short a time. This was indeed a case of helping the bush to help itself.

Special cases

Permanent clearings

A permanent open space in or adjoining bushland means an environment permanently favouring weeds. Roads, car parks, playing fields, private gardens, even small clearings made for park seats, are all potential trouble makers. If a strip of soil is disturbed and left exposed and particularly if filling has been brought in to level the ground, weeds can quickly replace the natives.

Tracks spread out from clearings, particularly from places where people leave cars. Many people, who would not dream of walking over a garden bed, will tramp unheedingly through the bush, smashing the plants and compacting the soil. Weeds are spread further, let in by the destruction of the native undergrowth. All our worst infestations have spread out from clearings, often accelerated by rubbish-dumping.

The verges of clearings are difficult places. Even when a strip of weeds is only a metre or two wide, clearing it