

BRACKEN FERN

(Notes contributed by Vic. Dept. of Agric.)

Bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is a persistent perennial weed widely spread throughout Victoria, where it is found growing on a wide range of soils in the better rainfall districts. It grows prolifically on deep fertile loams and on sandy soils. Even on shallow infertile soils it can persist to the exclusion of other species. Bracken is usually not prominent in bush and timbered country in its natural state; but, once the trees are cleared and the area opened up, bracken increases very rapidly.

Chemical weedicides have generally not proved satisfactory against bracken, and its control is best achieved through the competitive effect of improved pastures combined with mowing to destroy the re-appearing fronds.

On land badly infested with bracken, ploughing is often resorted to to break up the surface mat of rhizomes and to get an initial check of the weed. The bracken, however, soon re-establishes and further control measures are required to check it. The most effective method of suppressing the bracken is to mow it in the late spring and again in mid autumn. Mowing or burning during the winter, when most of the fronds have died off and the plant is dormant is quite ineffective.

On steep hillsides, hand cutting has to be resorted to, and on stony areas the control by mechanical means is almost impossible.

In most farming areas of Victoria where bracken is prominent, it has reached this state through neglect, usually consequent upon failure to apply pasture improvement treatment to the area or because the land has not responded to the treatment given.

Thorough and careful cleaning up of limited areas is desirable before extending the treatment to new areas. For this purpose the reciprocating mower is preferable to bracken rollers or drag-scrape implements, as the mower limits the area treated and encourages careful, thorough work, rather than slipshod methods, over extensive areas upon which the treatment may not be repeated.