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Bracken Control



Bracken:

- a major weed in many upland and upland margin areas
- a highly competitive perennial plant which produces a dense canopy of fronds
- can generate large amounts of litter to stop other species growing allowing it to expand and quickly dominate new areas
- has a wide soil tolerance, doing particularly well on deep acidic soils
- an extensive rhizome system; there are two basic types of bracken rhizome - superficial surface rhizomes and deeper, storage rhizomes which makes it highly tolerant of disturbance and controlling it difficult.

Bracken needs to be controlled

- to safeguard valuable grazing
- to reduce displacement of grazing onto more valuable and vulnerable habitats
- to reduce the risk of disease- bracken is toxic and carcinogenic at various stages of growth and its litter harbours the early life stages of sheep ticks

Cutting is perhaps the most widely used approach. In the autumn before any bracken control starts, disturb the litter of the bracken site by cutting where access and conditions allow. This will expose the rhizomes and allow frost to penetrate over winter. It depletes the stores of carbohydrates and nutrients held in the rhizome, eventually killing the plant. Cutting twice or three times a year is recommended.

Crushing, breaking, rolling or bruising can be easier in difficult to access locations, such as hill slopes where cutting may prove difficult and as an alternative to herbicide in organic farm situations. Success will be related to degree of damage done to the plant. Using livestock can prove useful as young bracken fronds growing just below the surface are particularly sensitive to treading during the spring. Cattle are more effective than sheep.

Ploughing/cultivation: to be effective deep furrows should be aimed for to ensure the bracken rhizomes are exposed. The site should then be left over winter and followed with spring sowing.

Spraying works very successfully. Bracken should be sprayed when the fronds are fully expanded and bright green, and before any die-back occurs. This is usually mid-July to late August. Do not cut grass or admit stock for 14 days after spraying bracken. Two types of herbicide are effective: Asulam and Glyphosate. (Note: The ban of 'Asulam' came into effect on 31 December 2011. After this date it is illegal to apply or store products containing Asulam unless Emergency Authorisation has been obtained). You are advised to follow the recommendations in the The Code of Practice for using Plant Protection Products (2006). Spray affects the bud-bearing surface rhizomes but has little effect on the storage system rhizomes and the bracken is able to regenerate so follow-up treatments are essential. If a gap of two years is left between spraying, dormant buds on the surviving bracken rhizomes will emerge and can be sprayed again.



See **Bracken Control** (www.brackencontrol.co.uk) for further general information.

