



There is nothing like the black of a perfect blackberry. So black it's a void of black, purple, blue. Stare into it and you might get lost. It seems too much for the eyes. Is there anything else we eat that is so black, so beneficial, so immediately satisfying and delicious?

Christ's crown of thorns was made from blackberry runners, the black juice his blood. Blackberries symbolize spiritual neglect. In neglected areas of land in Australia they will run forever and will quickly take over acres, if you let them.

I remember the suburban void zones as I was growing up in Seaford, Victoria and there were acres of unfriendly brambles growing up a couple of metres in height. Negotiating them was a nightmare they seemed hostile and unfriendly.

Rhizomes drill deep and the canes fire up every summer. Like privet they relish the virgin Australian earth. Like tomatoes in the tropics, blackberries go crazy... if you let them.

Have you every thought about what they are doing? They are there to repair the earth after we have invariably destroyed old growth forests, red cedar cathedrals with their own rhizomes and eco systems of great wonder.

Blackberries and black wattles are the beginning of the path back from total soil and eco-system destruction. After bush fires and mindless clearing, blackberries and black wattles appear.

Blackberries are a lot easier to manage than black wattles though we need new thinking and new strategies about them too. [Don't get me started, as all Africa knows, black wattles are extremely useful and their proliferous seeds are harvestable, protein rich and good for you, just like blackberries.]

Because they invade, blackberries are misunderstood and horribly managed. The ever-voracious chemical industry is even more voracious as the blackberries themselves. The chemical corporates push their products on local councils and broad acre farmers alike. Any smart land manager is swayed. One spray and they are gone. But it is a tragedy that itself symbolizes what is wrong with our environmental awareness. Responsible for the invasive plant in the first place, we make it worse by polluting earth, water and animals with chemicals that do no good. Eating blackberries has good effects on cancer, inflammation, brain health and liver disease.. spray with chemicals and you may well cause these problems. So many farmers and council workers have died because of toxic sprays.

A good slasher is the best way of keeping on top of blackberries, so easy, so environmentally superior and a process that, most importantly, uses the beneficial effect of blackberries to improve the soil. More about this later.





Norm Greer first introduced my family to the delights of blackberries on our property at Kangaroo Valley. Every Australia Day he would invite one of Nowra's prominent lawyers and they would amble with buckets gathering kilos for jams and other culinary delights. In the evening they would head off with great buckets happy with their day walking and picking.

Over years I have discovered that "the day" is highly significant. On this certain day every year clusters of ten or more perfectly ripe berries appear. The berries seem to be saying: "I am here for you, take me". You place them in the palm of your hand and gently brush them into your bucket. On that perfect day at that perfect moment you can gather kilos in a very short time. Tiny finches and green parrots are there too, en-masse, feasting on the amazing berries. If you go with them on that one day of ripeness, then all those experiences of struggling against the prickles and fighting blackberries all subside.

Wild Australian blackberries are unique. They taste 1000 times better than cultivated blackberries or thornless berries hydroponically grown, these lesser products taste like cardboard in comparison. Soon the chefs of the world will discover the unbelievable taste and goodness of a wild Australian berry re-nourishing land regenerating ancient forests for another millennium well beyond us.

Alex Podolinsky, Australia's greatest European farmer, would come to my farm annually to check out what I was doing, invariably wrong. "Why would you cut the earth with that plough and rotary hoe?" "Never do that again". "It seems like you are doing too much Peter, are you serious about farming? Or are you a writer? Or worse, a politician."

One day when we were walking and I was complaining about blackberry infestations he stopped me in my tracks. "Have you ever looked under a blackberry bush?" I said no. He immediately marched over to a huge thicket and invited me to look inside. "What do you see?" "Maybe there is a rabbit or a rat or a fox inside I said.

"What else do you see? Look at the colour of the earth?" He didn't have much time to waste and so he answered his own question. "Black, deep rich soil, the roots are bringing minerals up to the surface". "They drill deep, deep down" "You could grow anything here after blackberries" "Never forget this and never, never, never spray blackberries or you will undo all their good work". "Pick the berries and slash them back each year!" And he looked at me with this stern but kind look that was his trademark.

And so began my war with council, my other farmer mates, neighbours... the only thing we all agreed on was that a kilo of wild blackberries unsprayed was a delicacy. But most of my peers didn't care about the sprays. The wonderful insatiable blackberries would somehow still keep popping up trying to repair the damage. The tragedy of the sprays was of course that they poisoned all of the plant, the roots poisoned were inedible to worms, compacting





the soils compounding all the ills of European farming methods. Then my neighbours might spend thousands a year on artificial fertilisers that simply made plants feed on the top layer of the soil, washed away in the rains, and further polluting the rivers and creeks. Our terrible cycle of soil destruction would continue.

I am not the greatest farmer, Alex was right. Too much going on beyond the property but every year the blackberry harvest has assumed more and more significance. Each year all and sundry are invited to pick the precious blackberries on the day, Australia Day. Then we slash the summer brambles, leaving some for the following year.

At some point in the year a council letter will arrive telling me that a council contractor wants to come onto my property to spray the blackberries and I will invariably write back or get into an argument.

One day it might end. But not for a long time, even with a majority Green local council. Sometimes conservationists want the sprays. It's a lazy and ill conceived approach. Even the Greens are not always right.

Lets change the day, call Australia Day, Blackberry Day, a fitting title for invasion day. Lets reap the benefits of the invasive species and improve our soils. In the wake of the rich earth produced under the black berry brambles let us begin the task of reviving the ancient forests and ecosystems.

Let us too understand the misunderstood blackberry.

