

# Weed Alert!

## Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*)

***Old man's beard is a surveillance plant in the Marlborough District Council's Regional Pest Management Strategy. The weed is a major threat to areas of native vegetation in Marlborough.***

***A deciduous climber, it rapidly covers host species in a dense mat that excludes light, competes for resources and eventually collapses canopies by sheer weight of vegetation.***

***Vines can grow more than four metres in a season and spread both by seed (carried by water and wind) and vegetatively.***

### A weed of forest edges

Old man's beard is widespread throughout much of central New Zealand. It typically grows in forest edges and remnants, waste areas, streamsides and shelterbelts and is found throughout much of Marlborough.

The vine was introduced into New Zealand as a garden plant (then known as 'traveller's joy') early in the 20th century. By the 1970s it had become a serious weed.

### What to look for

Seedlings have one to three leaflets and the mature plant five leaves. The creamy white, perfumed flowers appear in summer and early autumn and the characteristic feathery seed heads from autumn to spring. Vines have six strong longitudinal ribs and older stems, pale brown stringy bark with longitudinal furrows. Do not confuse with native clematis which is three leaved, flowers from spring to early summer, seeds in late summer and has a smooth vine.

### Likes light, moisture and fertile soils

Research into old man's beard has found;

- the weed establishes where year-around moisture is available
- fertile mudstones and alluvial gravel plains provide preferred sites
- increased levels of nitrogen boost growth
- waterways offer the ideal means of rapid seed dispersal
- spread by road metal and machinery is significant
- seedlings are likely to be suppressed in areas with an intact forest canopy
- establishment is unlikely on relatively infertile greywacke soils
- seedlings are highly palatable to sheep, cattle, deer and presumably goats.



Old man's beard is self-fertile, meaning only one vine is needed to establish a new population.

## Control options

Control will need to be maintained at a minimum of every second year for at least 10 years after the last seeding plant has been removed. It is wise to work from areas of least infestation to areas of most infestation. Options include:

- **Physical control**

Suitable for small infestations only. Scattered small plants and seedlings can be hand-pulled and larger plants grubbed out with their roots left to dry. As plants can re-grow from stem fragments, ensure these are not allowed to remain in contact with the soil.

- **Chemical control**

Where vines are growing into the canopy, cut them at ground level and also at head height. This makes it easy to tell at a glance which vines have been cut, allows better access and prevents any vines missed from using old vines as support.

Paint/spray the cut stumps immediately with an appropriate herbicide mixture such as:

- 1 part Grazon to 20 parts water; or 1 part Glyphosphate to 4 parts water; or Vigilant gel.

If the stems are too numerous cut them closer to the ground, wait until they are actively regrowing and covered in leaves then spray the new growth with one of the following:

- Grazon; handgun, 400ml per 100 litres of water; or knapsack, 60ml per 10 litres of water
- Versatill; handgun, 500ml per 100 litres of water; or knapsack, 125ml per 10 litres of water
- Escort; handgun, 35g + 100ml Pulse per 100 litres of water; or knapsack, 5g + 10ml Pulse (surfactant) per 10 litres of water
- Glyphosate herbicide; handgun, 2 litres per 100 litres of water; or knapsack, 200ml + 10ml Pulse per 10 litres of water.

- **Biological control**

Two bio-control agents for old man's beard (leaf miner and fungus) are present throughout Marlborough but at low densities and may not be having much effect.



By killing native woody plants, old man's beard destroys food sources for native species including birds, lizards and insects.



Old man's beard is estimated to produce around 30,000 viable seeds per square metre of canopy which last for at least five years in the soil and possibly 10. The weed also spreads vegetatively. Stems trailing along the ground can root at each stem node to produce new plants.



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