

Old Man's Beard

Clematis vitalba

Old man's beard is a fast-growing, introduced clematis vine which forms a thick blanket of growth which smothers and eventually kills the trees and shrubs over which it scrambles. It poses a serious threat to large tracts of NZ's native bush.

Status

Old man's beard is of low incidence in the Auckland Region and containment or eradication is considered possible, utilising specialist expertise in identification and cost effective control methods.

It is on this basis that old man's beard is declared a Service Delivery Plant Pest.

This means that the ARC will carry out the required control work on behalf of, and at no cost to, the affected landowner. Each season, plants will be treated by expert staff at regular intervals to ensure that all infestations are controlled, reduced in size and eventually eradicated.

Old man's beard is also banned from sale, propagation, distribution or commercial display. Should you see this plant please report it immediately to the Auckland Regional Council which will arrange for its control.

Origin

A native of Europe, old man's beard was brought to NZ as a garden plant and was first recorded as growing wild in the mid 1930s in both the southern North Island and the northern South Island. It has spread rapidly in the last 20 years, however there are less than 3 dozen known sites within the Auckland region.



Description

Old man's beard is a perennial, woody climbing vine and is deciduous (i.e. loses its leaves each winter).

The vines are quite distinctive, with young ones having six longitudinal ribs, and mature vines having stringy, pale brown bark with longitudinal furrows. The older vines are woody and very stringy in nature.

The pale to dark green leaves are comprised of five leaflets (rarely more).

The leaflets are variable in shape, can be heart-shaped, rounded or lance-shaped, usually have a serrated edge and are covered with very fine white hairs.

The flowers are small (2cm in diameter), greenish-white in colour and appear between December and February. The seed heads appear after flowering and can be seen through autumn and winter (March-September). These are pom-pom shaped, fluffy, buff coloured and give the plant its name of old man's beard.

It is important that old man's beard is not confused with any of the native species of clematis. The natives usually have only 3 leaflets per leaf and flower in spring, whereas old man's beard has 5 leaflets and flowers in summer.

Old man's beard is a climber, its long vines entwining themselves around any available support on which they can climb up to the light. It is the leaf stalks that do the twining rather than the stem itself.

Invasion

Spread is mainly by seeds being transported by wind, water and in soil or gravel. Fragments of the vines are also spread by water and in dumped garden rubbish; these can take root and form new infestations.



Mature seeds in bearding stage



Seedheads

Control

Since the seeds are easily spread and remain viable for quite a long time, it is better to control old man's beard before January, when the seeds start to mature.

The best way of eradicating single plants is to trace the vines back to the roots and then to dig these out. Any vines trailing along the ground must be removed and burnt or else they may take root and establish new plants.

Alternatively, the vines can be cut as close to the roots as possible and the rooted ends treated liberally with 1 part Grazon to 20 parts water, or 1 part Glyphosate (Roundup G2 or Nufarm) to 10 parts water, or vigilant ready mixed gel. Again, care must be taken that no vines are left trailing on the ground.

Where old man's beard is rambling over waste ground or the infestation is too large to trace the vines, an overall foliage spray is generally a cheaper option.

The following mixtures give effective foliage control of old man's beard:

- **Grazon Handgun** 200mls per 100 litres water
- **Grazon Knapsack** 6mls per 1 litres water
- **Tordon BK Handgun** 250mls per 100 litres water
- **Tordon BK Knapsack** 6mls per 1 litres water
- **Escort Handgun** 35gms with 100 mls Pulse per 100 litres water
- **Escort Knapsack** 5gms with 10 mls Pulse per 10 litres water
- **Glyphosate (Roundup G2 or Nufarm)**
 - Handgun – 1 litre per 100 litres water
 - or Knapsack 200mls per 10 litres water.

CAUTION: When using any herbicide read the label thoroughly to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

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