

Wild Ginger

Hedychium gardnerianum,
Hedychium flavescens

There are two species of wild ginger, Kahili ginger (*Hedychium gardnerianum*) and Yellow ginger (*Hedychium flavescens*). Both species have the ability to form dense colonies in native forests, smothering young native plants as well as preventing native seedling establishment. This leads to the alteration of both the function and structure of native forest and in some instances results in the total death of the forest.

Status

Both wild gingers are of low incidence in some areas of the region and containment or eradication is considered possible. It is on this basis that both ginger species are declared as Total Control Plant Pests within the Waitakere/Hunua Ranges, off shore islands and most rural districts. (Refer to Auckland Regional Council for details). This means that land occupiers within these areas are required to control infestations of this plant growing on their land.



Kahili Ginger

However, throughout the rest of the urban areas, this plant is declared a National Surveillance Plant Pest. This means that land occupiers in these areas are encouraged to remove or control this plant on their land, but without legal obligation.

Both wild gingers are also banned from sale, propagation, distribution or commercial display.

However, should you see this plant in the Waitakere/Hunua Ranges, off shore islands or rural districts, please report it immediately to the Auckland Regional Council which will arrange for its control.

Origin

Kahili ginger is a native of India, growing on the lower slopes of the Himalayas, while yellow ginger originates in Eastern India and Madagascar. It is believed that both gingers have been cultivated in NZ gardens since 1865, but it was not until the 1940s that Kahili ginger was officially recorded as growing wild.

Description

Wild gingers are herbaceous perennial plants. This means that their life-spans extend for more than two years and they do not accumulate woody tissue. Wild ginger grows from large, branching rhizomes (tuberous roots). These rhizomes are up to 3.5 cm in diameter, up to 10 cm in height and produce vertical stems annually. Beds of living rhizomes can form a dense layer up to a metre thick.

Adult stems reach a maximum height of 2 metres and produce large wax covered, ovate alternate leaves (20 to 45cm long x 10 to 15cm wide). Yellow ginger leaves tend to be a little narrower than kahili ginger leaves.

Individual Kahili ginger flowers are lemon yellow with conspicuous red stamens, and are displayed in large composite flower heads from February to April. These flower heads are 12 to 45 cm in length and have been described as being similar to the shape of a Chinese lantern. Red seeds (1.5 to 1.8 cm long) are produced

by Kahili ginger during the autumn and winter months, with over 100 seeds per flower-head being produced under full-light conditions. Seed production tends to decrease as light levels decline under the forest canopy.

Yellow ginger flowers are cream to light yellow in colour and come out in the late autumn/early winter period. The flowers are displayed in smaller composite flowerheads than those of Kahili ginger. Yellow ginger flowers do not produce seed.

Wild ginger species prefer to grow in open, light-filled environments which are warm and moist, but will readily grow in semi and full shade beneath the forest canopy. Maximum growth occurs during spring and summer but the plant goes into a state of semi-dormancy during the winter period.

Both wild gingers spread outwards along the ground by way of rhizomes, with new stems sprouting annually.

Invasion

New plants may develop from rhizome portions which have become detached from the parent plant. The major source of this spread is by people illegally dumping ginger rhizomes on roadsides or in bush. Kahili ginger also spreads by birds, such as the tui and the blackbird, eating and dispersing seeds away from the original infestations. Seed is spread, accidentally, by people who have cut off stems which contain mature seed heads.

Control

Kahili ginger flowers can be cut and dropped on the ground prior to the seeds being formed, but if seeds are present put the heads in a bag and put them out with your rubbish. Flowerhead removal will not kill the plant but it will stop it seeding.

Digging is an effective method of removing small stands of wild ginger, providing all the roots are removed intact and disposed of safely at an authorised refuse transfer station.

Wild ginger can also be controlled by treating it with Escort herbicide. Being careful not to spray desirable neighbouring plants, spray the leaves, stems and root system making sure that coverage is complete. Do not remove the stalks and leaves until they have gone brown and dried out.

Mixing rates are:

- Escort Knapsack 5 gms per 10 litres water
 plus 10 mls spreader or penetrant (e.g. Pulse)
- Escort Handgun 25 gms per 100 litres water
 plus 100 mls spreader or penetrant (e.g. Pulse)

If the ginger plants are too tall for convenient spraying they can be chopped to waist height and sprayed as soon as possible, or alternatively chopped right down, allowed to regrow to a couple of feet and then sprayed. These methods mean less spray is used and there is less chance of drift.



Yellow Ginger

The effects of the spray are noticeable after 3 months and the weed will have died and its rhizomes rotted after 12 to 15 months.

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

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