

Moth Plant

Araujia sericifera

Moth plant has the ability to compete with, smother and replace native plant species in disturbed or low forest, scrub-forest margins and in open lands such as coastal areas or offshore islands. It is also a problem in urban reserves and gardens where it can become the dominant species. The plant is poisonous in that the white milky sap has an irritating effect on those who come in contact with it and the seed pods can have harmful effects on humans and animals if eaten.



Status

Moth plant is of low incidence in some areas of the Auckland Region and containment or eradication is considered possible. It is on this basis that Moth plant is declared a Total Control Plant Pest within the Waitakere Ranges and Great Barrier Island area only. This means that land occupiers within these areas, are required to control infestations of this plant growing on their land. However, throughout the rest of the Auckland Region, this plant is declared a National Surveillance Plant Pest. This means that land occupiers are encouraged to remove or control this plant growing on their land, but without legal obligation.

Moth plant is also banned from sale, propagation, distribution or commercial display. However, should you see this plant in the Waitakere Ranges or Great Barrier Island area, please report it immediately to the Auckland regional Council which will arrange for its control.

Origin

This native of Argentina and Brazil was brought to New Zealand as an ornamental species during the 1880s and its early popularity may have been enhanced by its sweetly scented flowers, as well as its supposed ability to trap codling moths by their tongues in the flowers. This is where the name moth plant originated. Moth plant is now common throughout urban parts of the Auckland Region and is also found in Northland, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Hawkes Bay and Nelson.

Description

Moth plant is a slender, evergreen climbing vine up to six metres high. It's life starts in spring as a stiff erect seedling growing from a short inclined taproot and numerous other weak shallow roots. After reaching 30cm in height the green stem becomes a slender tendril in search of support. In the climbing stage the leaves are large shield-shaped (arrowhead like), opposite one another, dark green on their upper sides and



Leaves, stems and fruit

greyish green on the undersides. On reaching the sun in the canopy or on the top of fences the vine branches profusely and the nearly oblong leaves are thick and wavy on the margins. Clusters of up to 7 small creamy coloured tubular flowers grow from the base of each leaf between December and May. Some of these flowers produce spongy, choko-like fruits as big as a fist which contain about 500 seeds attached to neatly packed silky threads. If bruised, detached or cut, the pods, stems and leaves of moth plant exude a sticky milk-like sap that is caustic.

Invasion

Spread of the plant is solely by the mainly wind-borne seeds which are freed from the pods as they dry out and split during autumn and winter. Seeds travel far and wide (normally up to 100 metres) on parachutes of fine silky tufts with some also being spread on animals, and peoples' clothing. Seeds can germinate freely at least 5 years from the time of being shed. Moth plant prefers loose, fertile soils in warmer, moderate to high rainfall areas.

Control

Hand Removal: Pull out seedlings and for larger plants trace back to root stock, loosen soil and hoe or dig out the crown with as much of the root attached as



possible. Remove all pods and dispose of safely to prevent further spread. Leave vines in host tree to wither and die. Revisit site after 3 - 5 days to attend to missed plants that are now obvious. Avoid skin contact with white sap. Follow up monthly to destroy seedlings.

- **Cut Vine Treatment:** Cut vines less than 20cm above ground and immediately paint directly onto remaining stems:-

Yates Woody Weedkiller.....1 part per 5 parts water

Banvine1 part per 4 parts water.

Alternatively, leave 4 weeks and spray regrowth as per knapsack applications.

Vigilant.....Apply ready made gel directly to 30-50cm of stem. (Don't cut vines as latex repels vigilant)

- **Knapsack Application:**

Banvine120 mls per 10 litre of water

Yates Woody Weedkiller.....120 mls per 10 litre of water

Grazon60 mls per 10 litre of water

Escort5gms+10 mls pulse per 10 litre of water

Tordon Brush Killer.....60mls plus 10mls pulse per 10 litre water

- **Handgun Application:**

Grazon300 mls per 100 litre of water

Escort35gms+100 mls pulse per 100 litre of water

Tordon Brush Killer.....250mls+100 mls pulse per 100 litre of water

Note: Best spraying results Spring to Autumn

Important Notes: Avoid skin contact with white milky sap. Remove all pods and bury etc as pods will draw up food from vines, ripen and seed surrounding area. Choose and apply control method carefully to minimise damage to desirable plants.

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

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Printed on Chlorine-free paper. October 1999.