

Old man's beard

Ranunculaceae - Clematis vitalba



What does it look like?

Old man's beard is a deciduous climbing vine that grows up to 20m tall. It has woody stems with six prominent ribs and pale bark that rubs off easily. The leaves are arranged in opposite pairs along the stems, and each is made up of five leaflets (like a hand). The thin leaflets are sparsely hairy and have bluntly toothed or smooth edges. Fragrant, creamy-white flowers are produced from December to May. Flowers are followed by dense, fluffy clusters of seeds, which persist over winter.

Old man's beard is a light-demanding species. It grows in low forest, scrub, shrubland, riparian margins and in forests with well-lit margins, wide tracks, waterways or clearings. Sometimes confused with native clematis, however the native species have three leaflets (not five), no lines or grooves on the stems, and flower from August to December.

Why is it a problem?

Old man's beard is a fast-growing vine with the ability to climb up into the canopy. It smothers and collapses even tall trees and can reduce a forest to an impenetrable, low-growing infestation of the vine. It moves into established forest over the canopy by layering. Old man's beard produces huge amounts of seed, which initially have a high viability rate. Seed viability declines rapidly but some seed is retained in the soil for up to five years. It also reproduces vegetatively from rooting stem fragments and vines that touch the ground can take root.

Control methods

Chemical control:

- Slash thick stems (all year round) at 1 m and ground level (to prevent stump resprouting and aerial roots attaching from hanging stems). Paint cut stumps with glyphosate (250ml/L) or metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (5g /L) or a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (100ml/L) or triclopyr 600 EC (100ml/L) or triclopyr 120g/L (500ml/L) or Banvine (200ml/L) or dicamba 50g/L (400ml/L) or picloram gel. Leave stems in air to die. Dispose of cutaway segments at a refuse transfer station or by burning.
- Spray (spring-autumn): glyphosate (20ml/L) or clopyralid (12.5ml/L).

CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

More information

Stumps resprout very quickly and cut stems root at nodes. Replant bared areas promptly to minimise seedling regrowth. Check for seedlings at least 6-monthly.

Request info

<https://eservices.es.govt.nz/online-services/new/BiosecurityRFS/step/1?Subject=PlantPests&Species=54>

Report this Pest/Weed

<https://eservices.es.govt.nz/online-services/new/BiosecurityIncident/step/1?Subject=PlantPests&Species=54>

Notify Council

If you have seen or suspect the presence of Old man's beard you must report the sighting to Environment Southland immediately.

Management programme

- Progressive containment
- Unwanted organism
- National Pest Plant Accord

Summary of rules

- No person can sell, propagate, breed, distribute or otherwise spread any Old man's beard. For full rules please see Sections 52 and 53 of the [Biosecurity Act 1993](#).