Smilax

Asparagus asparagoides

Total Control Plant under the West Coast Regional Pest Plant Management Strategy

Suspected sightings of this Total Control Plant should be reported promptly to the West Coast Regional Council or DOC Conservancy Office, Hokitika

National Pest Plant Accord Status

Smilax is listed in the 2008 National Pest Plant Accord and is banned from sale, propogation and distribution in New Zealand. For more information refer to MAF Biosecurity New Zealand, **www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa**

Where has it come from?

Also known as Bridal Creeper, Smilax originated from South Africa. In New Zealand the plant is common in the top of the North Island but diminishes southward with just a few known sites in the South Island.

What does Smilax look like?

Smilax is a scrambling or twining perennial vine which grows up to 3m high over supporting shrubs and small trees. It is characterised by clusters of white, fleshy, tuberous roots and twisted thin, wiry, many branched stems which are either green or slightly brown and woody.

Ovalish, pointed 'cladodes' (green flattened stems resembling leaves), each having seven veins, are spread out along the stems at each stem node. These cladodes, 10-35mm long by 4-15mm wide, distinguish Smilax from all other Asparagus species.

The greenish-white flowers are 5-6mm long appear singly or in pairs through July and August, followed by round red berries 6-10mm long containing 2-8 tiny black seeds.

The plant is spread by seed movement—wind, water and birds—and re-sprouting of broken off tubers. Other than a preference for good drainage, it tolerates moderate shade to full sun, low to moderate rainfall, salt and wind.

Why is Smilax a Pest Plant?

Smilax is a pest plant because it forms dense patches in a variety of habitats, smothering native bush and other preferred species. The seed is very viable and spread far and wide by birds and the densely clustered tubers are difficult to eradicate. It often gains a hold on marginal lands such as roadsides, old quarries and steep banks.

Top Right : Smilax creeper [A Paltridge]
Above left: Smilax berries [ARC]

THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

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What are the best methods of control?

A combination of control methods is advised for eradication of Smilax. Whilst tubers can be grubbed, opening up the soil also allows seeds which have dropped to get started. Also 'pulling' the plants is not a good option as the stems are apt to break off at ground level leaving the tubers to re-sprout again. Overall, once the area has had 2-3 successful treatments, replant with preferred species to establish good ground cover which will help minimise re-invasion.

Manual Methods

Dig out smaller plants/infestations taking care to get all the tubers. Dispose of tubers carefully in black plastic bags to landfill and leave vines on ground to rot down, or burn them. Or alternatively, hand paint glysophate spray mix (glysophate 20ml/1L water) on with a brush or paint roller. Wear nitrile gloves while doing so as only nitrile gloves are resistant to herbicide penetration.

Herbicide Methods

Appropriate herbicides can be applied by either weed-wiping or spraying.

- Weed-wiping: use glysophate 333ml/1L water without penetrant in spring— early summer only.
- Spraying: use glysophate 20ml/1L water + penetrant in spring – early summer only. Do not use penetrant when spraying up against tree trunks and spray lightly, avoiding runoff.

For personal safety please use all herbicides as per manufacturer's labelling

Biocontrols

Bridal Creeper (Smilax) Rust has naturalised in New Zealand, after being windblown across the Tasman from Australia. The rust is proving successful both in Australia and New Zealand and has been found all over the North Island and in the top of the South Island. The rust is not being actively cultivated for organised release as observations are showing that is spreading readily on its own.

Where can I get more help?

For further information call either of the Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinators. They are:

Mary Trayes: Environmental Information Officer, West Coast Regional Council (768 0466 or 0508 800 118)

Tom Belton: Technical Support Officer Biosecurity & Weeds, Department of Conservation, West Coast - Tai Poutini Conservancy, Hokitika (03 756 9100)

WEEDBUSTERS

www.weedbusters.org.nz

The West Coast Regional Council does not accept liability for any advice given on this sheet regarding application of herbicides for pest plant control. The brand names listed imply neither endorsement of those brands, nor criticism of any other brands not listed.

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