

# Old Man's Beard

## *Clematis vitalba*

**Progressive Control Plant under the  
West Coast Regional Pest Plant  
Management Strategy**



### National Pest Plant Accord Status

Old Mans Beard is listed in the 2008 National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) and is banned from sale, propagation and distribution in New Zealand. For more information refer to the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand website at [www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa)

### Where has Old Man's Beard come from?

Old Man's Beard is native to Europe and south-western Asia and was introduced into New Zealand in 1905 as a decorative plant. Since then it has spread throughout most of the country with several regions having major issues with large infestations. On the West Coast most sightings have been in Buller District to date.

### What does Old Man's Beard look like?

Being a clematis, Old Man's Beard, is somewhat similar to native plants of the same species. But closer inspection reveals distinct differences, enabling ready identification. Old Man's Beard is a fast growing (up to 10m per year), deciduous vine which forms a tangled, smothering mass over trees and shrubs.

Plant stems have longitudinal ribs with five leaves arranged in two opposite pairs and one at the end (compared to native clematis species which have three leaf stems). Young vines are green to purplish, but older vines are woody with flaking bark. Flowering occurs from December to April, the clustered flowers being fragrant, creamy white and about 2cm across. This is followed by setting of prolific creamy-white, fluffy seed heads (a distinctive feature) in the autumn. Seeds are highly viable and long lived, and spread by wind, water and birds. Plants can also revegetate from plant fragments or layering of drooping vine stems.



Top right: Old Man's Beard flower and leaf detail. [BNZ]  
Above: Old Man's Beard smothering native bush  
[J Hazeley, DOC]

### Why is Old Man's Beard a Pest Plant?

Old Man's Beard grows rapidly and vigorously into a smothering dense mass of vine. A single plant can spread the size of a large house (200m<sup>2</sup>), with multiple stems which will smother other plants and can take over the forest canopy killing mature trees. The dense vines will ity also shade the ground, preventing natural regeneration of native or other desired plants.

Once established the plant is difficult to eradicate because the long lived seeds will continue to germinate, making any control work ongoing.

Old Man's Beard has the capacity to kill large tracts of West Coast bush should it become entrenched here.

## What are the best methods of control?

Constant vigilance is the optimum control method. New sightings should be reported so they can be dealt with before they are a major problem. Established infestations can be tackled with a range of methods which will require follow-up work. Root and stem parts must be disposed of carefully to prevent re-growth.

### **Manual Methods**

Handpull or dig out small seedlings and either dry and burn OR dispose of to lined landfill. For plants which have gained a hold and are climbing over others, cut the vines at waist level and leave the stems "hung up" in the trees to die. Trace the other ends back to the root ball and dig it out. Ensure roots and vine stems are disposed of to lined landfill.

### **Herbicide Methods**

Choose from the following methods depending on the size of your infestation and/or whether or not you wish to retain other plants.

- **Stump-swabbing:** Cut the vines at waist height and leave upper stems hanging in trees to die off. Trace lower stems down the rootball then dig around it to expose as much of it as possible. Cut out as much as possible then immediately apply herbicide concentrate to the remaining rootball—lower stem area with brush or applicator. Proven herbicides are those containing the active ingredients, metsulfuron (e.g. Escort), triclopyr and picloram (e.g. Tordon products) and Vigilant Gel. Dispose of all root and stem parts carefully, e.g. rot down in black plastic bags or dispose of to lined landfill.
- **Spray re-growth:** Cut the vines about 1m from the ground during the autumn - winter. Then spray the spring re-growth before flowering commences. The clopyr - picloram mix, Tordon Brushkiller, at 6ml/1Lwater +1ml penetrant (knapsack rate), has proven effective for this method.

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

### **Biocontrols**

As of March 2008 NZ Landcare Research reported that three biological control agents have been released against Old Man's Beard: the leaf fungus (*Phoma clematidina*), the leaf miner (*Phytomyza vitalbae*), and the saw fly (*Monophadnus spinolae*). All three agents attack the foliage, and the fungus also damages the stems. Only the leaf miner has established and is common and widespread. The fungus had some impact early on but may have since died out. No sign of the sawfly has ever been seen and it seems unlikely that it has survived. A fourth agent, a bark beetle (*Xylocleptes bispinus*), is currently being investigated. For an update on this please contact the WCRC Weedbusters Co-ordinator or see [www.landcareresearch.co.nz](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz)

## Where can I get more help?

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

**Mary Traves:** 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



[www.weedbusters.org.nz](http://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.*