

Pest of the month

Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*).



Old Man's Beard is a deciduous, woody vine that can climb up to 25 metres above ground level and is considered one of New Zealand's worst smothering pests. The plant will outgrow and eventually smother supporting plants and trees and a single plant can cover up to 180 square metres in area. It is particularly troublesome in second growth indigenous forest. It has conspicuous white flowers produced in late summer that mature in autumn forming a dense fluffy down, consisting of seeds with long, fluffy "tails" that assist dispersal by wind and water. It is a prolific seeder, producing up to 10,000 per square metre.

Old Man's Beard is a native of Europe and was originally called Traveller's Joy. It has been present in the South Island for more than a century and has been recognised as a serious pest since early 1970s. It has the potential to invade most lowland areas of the Tasman-Nelson region. In 1986, it was declared a noxious plant in Golden Bay and in the Upper Buller area (under the Noxious Plants Act). It is now designated as a pest plant (under the Biosecurity Act) in the Tasman-Nelson Regional Pest Management Strategy in Golden Bay and the Upper Buller. Where there are only limited areas of Old Man's Beard at present it is still considered feasible to achieve control.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy requires occupiers to control Old Man's Beard in the Golden Bay/Kaiteriteri and Buller Catchment areas because of its low incidence and their high natural values. In the rest of the Tasman-Nelson region, Biosecurity Officers will provide advice to the public on controlling the plant and continue to fund research into biocontrol agents and carry out control at sites of high public value.

One method of killing Old Man's Beard is to cut the vine at the base and immediately apply a herbicide (such as Vigilant) before the cut surface has time to dry. Cuttings should not be left on moist ground as they can re-establish by rooting from the stem nodes. Another method is to spray low-growing plants, but care must be taken to avoid drift on to non-target species.

As seeds can be viable for up to 10 years in the ground, control at Old Man's Beard sites must continue for a long time. Many sites are at risk of re-invasion as seeds can be carried by wind for several kilometres. However, waterways are the main means of transporting seed and the seed remains viable in gravel for a number of years. Care must be taken to select gravel that is free from Old Man's Beard when using gravel in new areas.

If you live in Golden Bay, the Kaiteriteri area or Upper Buller catchment and suspect Old Man's Beard is growing near you, please contact a Tasman District Council Biosecurity Officer. Ph 03 543 8400.