

Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*)

Is Old Man's Beard on your property?

Old Man's Beard (OMB) is a serious pest plant around Upper Hutt and the problem is rapidly becoming worse. Forest & Bird Upper Hutt branch have started a project to minimise the amount of OMB in parts of Upper Hutt. This project is supported by DoC, Greater Wellington Regional Council and Upper Hutt City Council. We are currently working along River Road, from the southern end, cutting and pasting the growth on the western hills. We will not see the full effect of this work until spring, when the plants we have treated will fail to grow new leaves and to flower.

OMB is a wild clematis from Europe & South West Asia. In New Zealand it has no natural enemies and it grows rapidly forming a dense, heavy mass that dominates lowerland forest margin canopies. It can also be found in shrubland, riverbeds, cliffs, bush tracks, fernland and tussockland.

Identification

A deciduous, climbing layer vine to 20m tall. Stems are long and woody with deeply-grooved, pale, easily peeled bark. The leaves consist of 5 widely-spaced, thin, papery leaflets. Creamy white, fragrant flowers 2-3 cm in diameter appear December – May. Seeds are grey and hairy with distinctive white plumes 3-4 cm long in dense fluffy clusters that persist over winter. When seeds are present the plant is very easy to identify, especially when it is climbing over the forest canopy. The distinctive stems are also easy to identify below the canopy.

Why is OMB such a problem?

Rapid growth rate and ability to dominate and choke trees, shrubs and even large areas of forest. Forms dense, permanent masses. Tolerant of cold, shade, damp, wind, salt and most soil types. Produces many long-lived seeds.

How does it spread?

Seeds are spread by water or wind and both seed and stem fragments (which can re-grow when on the ground) are spread in dumped vegetation. Common sources of infestation are roadsides, hedgerows, vacant land and willow swamps.

Impact on indigenous plants

Smothers and kills plants of all sizes. Prevents regeneration and moves readily into established forests.

Control is simple:

1. Cut stems at 1m above ground and at ground level (horizontal to ground) to so that you can see where you have been, and to prevent hanging vines from re-rooting. **Swab all cut stumps with weed killer.** The easiest to use is picloram gel eg Vigilant (trade name). You can also use metsulfuron (e.g. Escort) at 5 g/L, Tordon brush killer at 10%, or Banvine at 20%. Dispose of cut segments to land fill. This can be done all year round.
Products available in Upper Hutt = Triumph Gel (UH Produce \$35.00), Weed Weapon Invade Gel (Mitre10 \$28.97), Vigilant (Mitre10 \$49.98).

2. For ground infestations, spray with glyphosphate (e.g. Roundup) at 2%, metsulfuron, Tordon brush killer or Versatill. Spraying is best done in spring when the plant is in full leaf but prior to flowering.
3. Seedling plants can be pulled out all year round.

Site Management

Do not leave cut stems to mulch. Dispose of them by hanging in a nearby bush so they do not touch the ground, burning, dispose at land fill.

Stumps re-sprout very quickly. If this happens recut the stump and paste or spray the regrowth.



Old Man's Beard seed heads



Old Man's Beard flower



Old Man's Beard branch



showing bark grain



Stump cut & pasted

For further information & help:

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