

# Boxthorn

*Lycium ferocissimum*

Family Solanaceae



## Identification

- Evergreen shrub (up to 6 metres tall) with long, sharp spines
- Woody stems are densely branched, forming box-like patterns
- Bright green, narrow, fleshy leaves grow alternately along young stems; in clusters on mature stems
- Pale/mauve/white flowers on slender stalks appear from July to March
- Orange/red round berries produced in autumn - poisonous



Mature boxthorn leaves in clusters Photo: K. McCombs. Inset: Boxthorn berry and flower Photo: C. Howell.



Tall boxthorn Photo: C. Howell

## Why is it a problem?

Boxthorn is an aggressive weed that tolerates a wide range of soil types, drought and salt spray. In areas of high light (it is intolerant of shade) boxthorn can exclude native vegetation and become the dominant plant species. Thickets of boxthorn have also been known to entangle seabirds as they come ashore to their burrows, eventually causing death. The seeds are dispersed by birds feeding on the berries.

## Where is it a problem?

Boxthorn is mainly found growing in dry, coastal areas. In Canterbury it can be found growing as hedges along roadsides, in waste places, sand dunes, gravel areas, estuary margins and on islands.

## Control

Small seedlings can be grubbed out, removing all root material. Be aware of the nasty spines when handling this species. Larger plants can be cut and stump treated with an appropriate herbicide. The stump can re-sprout if left untreated. Use all herbicides in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other plants, the soil and waterways.

## Status

Boxthorn is a Restricted Pest under the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy (2005). This means it is not allowed to be sold, propagated or distributed within Canterbury.



Boxthorn invading a coastal area near Wellington. Photo: C. Howell