

Grey Willow

Also known as Pussy willow. Botanical name: *Salix cinerea*.

Pronunciation: sa-*liks* sin-er-e-a *Salix*(Lat.) = willow *cinerea* (Lat.) = ash-coloured. Family: Salicaceae (Willow).

Identification

- **Deciduous tree** up to 7m tall with **catkins** (clusters of flowers) appearing in spring, often before the leaves.
- Leaves are arranged **alternately**, and are **oval shaped**. They are **green** and shiny on top, with fine white/grey hairs underneath.
- Grey willow plants are either male or female. On female grey willow, **catkins** are more than twice as long as they are wide. Male plants have catkins that are almost the same size in length and width (the distinctive “pussy willow” catkin). Male flowers have **yellow tipped anthers** (see photo).



Seedling - Photo: K. McCombs



Anthers - Photo: K. McCombs

Why is it a problem?

- Grey willows produce many **widely dispersed seeds**, so it is able to invade new areas. Dense thickets form due to suckering and the ability of stem fragments to sprout.
- It can **tolerate** flooding, hot and cold temperatures, and semi-shade.
- Grey willow often invades areas of short vegetation along stream and lake edges, river systems and wetlands throughout New Zealand. It **produces a canopy**, significantly changing the environment for the existing species.
- It's **vigorous growth** and spread leads to blockages, flooding and structural changes in waterways.



Female catkins - Photo: K. McCombs

Control

Pull seedlings out, or cut and paint larger plants with herbicide. Place material into an appropriate landfill - don't leave it lying on the ground or try to compost. Use all herbicides in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other plants, the soil or waterways. For large infestations, target removal of female plants first, to reduce long-distance spread.



Male catkins - Photo: K. McCombs

Similar species

Crack willow has longer and thinner leaves, paler below, shining on top, with the older leaves hairless.

Contact weeds@ecan.govt.nz for more information



Female flowers- Photo: K. McCombs