

# Old man's beard

*Clematis vitalba*

Family Ranunculaceae



## Identification

- Deciduous, smothering, climbing vine
- Young stems are ribbed, older stems woody
- Each leaf is made up of 5 leaflets (young plants may have only 3 leaflets)
- Creamy white flowers appear from December to May
- Bark appears very stringy and easily rubs off on older stems
- Fluffy grey seed-heads persist over winter (March to October)



Old man's beard flowers and leaf (made up of 5 leaflets) Photo: DOC



Fluffy seed-heads Photo: K. McCombs

## Similar species

Old man's beard looks very similar to native clematis species. To distinguish, native clematis species have smooth stems and each leaf is made up of 3 leaflets. They also flower from September to November and don't lose their leaves over winter.

## Why is it a problem?

Old man's beard is a serious threat to native bush and can be found growing throughout New Zealand. It grows extremely fast and aggressively to the canopy where it forms a dense heavy mass, smothering the vegetation beneath it. It prevents light reaching the ground, making it difficult for native seedlings to grow.

The fluffy seed is easily dispersed by wind and water, allowing a new plant to grow further afield where it can become difficult to find and control. Everytime a stem touches the ground, it can take root and send up a new plant.

## Control

Hand pull or dig out small plants. Vines climbing through trees or hedges are best traced back to ground level. Cut the stem as close to the ground as possible and paint the stump immediately with herbicide. Ensure hanging vines are clear from the ground so they cannot take root. Large areas, particularly where it grows as a ground cover, can be sprayed. 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

Old man's beard is listed in the Regional Pest Management Strategy. For information on rules and control of old man's beard, contact Environment Canterbury, Customer Services 0800 EC INFO



Old man's beard growing to the canopy Photo: Environment Canterbury