Old man's beard
Clematis vitalba

Family
Ranunculaceae (buttercup)

Also known as
Travellers' joy, wild clematis

Where is it originally from?
Europe, South West Asia

What does it look like?
Deciduous, climbing, layering vine (<20 m tall) with very long, woody stems with six prominent ribs (appear as furrows in older vines) and pale, easily rubbed-off bark. Leaves are arranged in opposite pairs on the stems, and are made up of five (rarely three) widely spaced leaflets that fall in autumn. Thin, papery leaflets are sparsely hairy and have bluntly toothed or smooth edges. Creamy white, fragrant flowers (2-3 cm diameter, Dec-May) are followed by grey, hairy seeds (2-3 mm long) with distinctive white plumes (3-4 cm long) in dense, fluffy clusters persisting over winter (hence the 'old man's beard'). N

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

Are there any similar species?
All native clematis species are evergreen, have 3 leaflets (except the leafless *C. afoliata*), unfurrowed stems, and flower from August to December. All exotic species that are found in the wild are deciduous (flowers Dec-May), except the occasionally weedy, pink-flowered *C. montana* (flowers Oct-Dec).

Why is it weedy?
Grows rapidly, forming dense, heavy, masses that dominate canopy of any height. Stems layer profusely, and it produces many long-lived seeds if exposed to frost. Tolerant of cold, moderate shade, damp, wind, salt, most soil types, and damage.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

How does it spread?
Seed is spread by water or wind, and both seed and stem fragments are spread in dumped vegetation. Common sources are forests, roadsides, hedgerows, vacant land, and willow swamps.

What damage does it do?
Smothers and kills all plants to the highest canopy, and prevents the establishment of native plant seedlings. Moves readily into established forest over canopy and by layering.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Disturbed and open forest and forest margins, shrublands, riverbeds, cliffs, bush tracks, fernland, and tussockland.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Introduce biological control agents wherever weed is common - contact your regional council for more information.
2. Cut and paste: Cut the stem/trunk as close to the ground as possible and again above ground (to prevent aerial roots attaching from hanging stems) and cover the entire stump with herbicide as soon as possible after cutting. Apply metsulfuron gel (10g/l strength) or picloram gel (43g/l strength), or a product containing triclopyr + picloram 50ml/L water mixture over the entire cut stump. Dispose of cutaway segments to refuse transfer station or burn.
3. Basal spray stems: Basal spray stems up to 20cm diametre with X-Tree Basal. Apply from the ground to a height of 6 times the diameter of the plant, ensure the base is thoroughly covered at ground level.
4. Foliar spray:
Apply Glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide at a rate of 20ml/L or to cover entire plant. Note: Glyphosate overspray will kill other (desirable) plants
OR triclopyr (600g/L active ingredient) herbicide at a rate of 6ml/L
OR picloram/triclopyr (picloram 100g/l and triclopyr 300g/l active ingredient) herbicide at a rate of 6ml/L to

thoroughly wet all parts of plant. Note: Triclopyr and picloram herbicides are 'grass friendly' but overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants
OR clopyralid herbicide (300g/l active ingredient) at a rate of 12.5ml/L. Clopyralid is a herbicide for selective control on plants in the daisy family and some broadleaf weeds. Do not use over or near water bodies or wetlands and use only as directed on label.

CAUTION: When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and directions for the purchase, use and storage of the product, are followed and adhered to.

What can I do to stop it coming back?
Stumps resprout very quickly and cut stems root at nodes. Replant bared areas promptly to minimise seedling regrowth. Check for seedlings at least 6-monthly.