

Bell heather

Erica cinerea

Family

Ericaceae (heath)

Also known as

bell heather

Where is it originally from?

Western Europe

What does it look like?

Long-lived, low growing (<30 cm), bushy shrub with small needle-like leaves arranged in groups of three around stems. Bell-shaped, mostly purple (sometimes pink or white) flowers (6 mm long, Dec-Feb) produce large amounts of seed in mature plants.

Are there any similar species?

Calluna vulgaris

Why is it weedy?

Forms dense mats, suckers and seeds profusely, and is faster growing than its subalpine competitors. Tolerates cold, high to low rainfall, semi-shade, and poor soils, but is intolerant of heavy shade.

How does it spread?

Mature plants produce large amounts of seeds that are viable for a long time (30-40 years). Seed spread via gravity, wind, animals, ornamental trade.

What damage does it do?

Adversely impacts environmental values of rocky outcrops, low stature shrub land and tussock communities in the hill and high country by competing with native species such as flax and snow tussock. Loss of production from pastoral agriculture is also a possibility if left uncontrolled in the hill and high country. Has allelopathic properties, especially affecting grasses, and may cause patches of bare soil as a result that are vulnerable to further weed invasion or erosion.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?

Grows on hillsides, cliffs, dry slopes, sea cliffs heaths, rocky ground, woods, frequently disturbed sites and tussock grassland. Can tolerate acidic, waterlogged soils, has slight salt tolerance and frost resistant. Primary coloniser of sites after burning, and slow decaying litter can affect frequency and/or intensity of fire risk on dry sites.

What can I do to get rid of it?

Stump swab: Cut plant close to ground apply or picloram gel or metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (1g) + glyphosate (100ml) per L water to the fresh stump.

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?

Maintain an annual control programme to prevent further seeding.



www.weedbusters.org.nz



Photo: Trevor James