

Climbing asparagus

Asparagus scandens

Family

Liliaceae (lily)

Also known as

Myrsiphyllum scandens Synonym of *Asparagus scandens*

Where is it originally from?

South America

What does it look like?

Slender scrambling or climbing perennial with tuberous roots, and long green, thin, wiry stems (2-4 m long) that are much branched at the top. Leaves ((5-15 mm x 1-1.5 mm) are flat cladodes (leaf-like structures, resembling miro), and are usually in groups of three at each node. Tiny whitish flowers (Sep-Dec) are followed by round berries (8 mm diameter, Oct-Feb) that ripen from green to orange-red and contain 1-2 seeds each.

Are there any similar species?

Asparagus densiflorus, *A. asparagoides* and *A. setaceus* (*A. plumosa*, asparagus 'fern') are similar.

Why is it weedy?

Forms dense patches on ground or sub-canopy in most forest types, has tough, long-lived tubers that resprout easily, moderate growth rate and well dispersed seeds. Tolerates moderate to heavy shade, most soil types, moderate to high rainfall, and hot to cold temperatures.

How does it spread?

Birds, especially blackbirds, spread the seeds, and tubers resprout after being spread in dumped vegetation and soil. Common sources include waste areas, hedgerows, exotic forests, and roadsides.

What damage does it do?

Smothers forest floor and understorey to 4 m, preventing the establishment of native plant seedlings and growth of established species. Raises light levels, causing the invasion of further weeds. Can ringbark and kill soft-barked shrubs and trees, and invades areas where epiphytes are usually found, replacing already vulnerable species.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?

Disturbed and intact lowland and coastal forest, shrublands, mature broadleaf and/or podocarp forests, epiphyte niches, and forest edges.

What can I do to get rid of it?

Maintain rolling front of control, work out from inner bush.

1. Dig out tubers. Dispose of at a refuse transfer station, burn or bury. Other plant material can be left on site to rot down.
2. Spray (spring-early summer only): glyphosate (20ml/L). Do not add penetrant when spraying against tree trunks. Spray lightly, avoiding runoff, total coverage not required.
3. Spray (autumn and winter in frost free areas and on healthy growth): glyphosate (10ml/L). Infestations of plants taller than 60cm should be cut at a height of 30-60cm then this lower vegetation can be carefully sprayed. The remaining cut material will die without the need for treatment. Spot spray any missed plants within 30-60 days.

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.



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Photo: Carolyn Lewis



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What can I do to stop it coming back?

Tubers usually resprout after spraying, stems break at ground level so plants cannot be pulled. Tuber fragments survive digging. Follow up at least 6 monthly. Seed longevity probably short. Replant treated areas where possible after 2-3 treatments to establish dense ground cover and minimise reinvasion.