

Sweet pea shrub

Polygala myrtifolia

Family

Polygalaceae (milkwort)

Where is it originally from?

South Africa

What does it look like?

Evergreen legume-like shrub (<2 m tall) with young shoots that have short curly hairs, otherwise the plant is hairless. Smooth, woody, stems are much branched, and oval leaves (15-30 mm long) are arranged alternately on the stem. Three-petalled purple and green (on outside of side petals) sweet-pea like flowers (15-17 mm long, Jan-Dec) in short clusters at the end of stems are followed by flat, heart-shaped seed capsules (10 mm long) containing hairy, dark brown seeds (5 mm long).

Are there any similar species?

Polygala myrtifolia cultivar 'Grandiflora' is commonly sold, has many, larger flowers, all parts of which are purple, and does not set seed.

Why is it weedy?

Fast growing, shades out low-growing coastal shrubs, and produces many, very long-lived seeds. Tolerates salt, wind, drought, hot to moderately cool temperatures, poor and rocky soil, fire, and damage, but intolerant of moderate shade and frost.

How does it spread?

Seed is spread in soil and water movement.

What damage does it do?

Forms dense stands, discouraging the establishment of native species. Short-lived but replaced continuously from seedbanks.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?

Shrubland, bluffs, short tussockland, bare and rocky land, all on coastal areas, seldom weedy inland.

What can I do to get rid of it?

1. Hand pull small plants (all year round). Mulch.
2. Slash larger plants in regenerating shrubland (summer). Mulch.
3. Stump swab (all year round): metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (1g/L) or a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (100ml/L).
4. Spray (larger infestations): glyphosate (100ml/10L + penetrant).

What can I do to stop it coming back?

Cut stumps occasionally resprout. Seed germinates in bare areas, especially after fires. Easy to kill, however seedling regrowth is usually extensive, so budget for ongoing follow up. Eradicate systematically, working downhill or in blocks along coastline. Replant where possible.



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Photo: Carolyn Lewis



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