Chocolate vine or akebia

Akebia quinata

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Lardizabalaceae (lardizabala)

Also known as
akebia

Where is it originally from?
Central China to Korea and Japan

Photo: Trevor James

What does it look like?
Deciduous, twining climber and vigorous groundcover that can be evergreen in mild climates. Slender, round stems are green when young and brown when mature. Leaves made up of five or less oval leaflets (3-6 x 2-4 cm) creating a hand shape are on long stalks (<12 cm) and have a purplish tinge that becomes blue-green at maturity. Flowers (25 mm across) are chocolate-purple coloured with the scent of vanilla or chocolate, and hang in clusters (5-10 cm long, Aug-Oct) of 6-8 flowers may be followed by purple-violet, flattened sausage-like pods (8-9 cm long) filled with a whitish pulp surrounding many tiny black seeds.

Why is it weedy?
Grows very rapidly, producing so many stems that it forms a thick, tangled mat that covers other plants. Forms a thick groundcover if it doesn't have anything to grow up, smothering seedlings and stopping other plants establishing. It spreads by stem fragments, and birds also spread the seed. Tolerates a wide range of conditions from full sun to shade, drought and frost, sandy to clay soils, and acid or alkaline soils.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

How does it spread?
Predominantly vegetative spread, growing up to 6-14m in a single growing season, plus bird-dispersed seed.

What damage does it do?
Quickly smothers, outcompetes and kills herbs and seedlings, shrubs and young trees. Once established, its dense growth prevents seed germination and establishment of seedlings of native plants.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Prefers partial shade and well-drained yet moist soil, such as in riparian zones, forest edges, wetlands and urban areas.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - Hand pull or dig out entire plant. Ensure all plant material is removed from site to prevent regrowth from cut stems and branches. Put pods in bags to dispose of to landfill. Note large areas of bare soil are ideal for weed to establish. To avoid this, plant or sow desirable species to cover the bare soil.
2. Cut and paste - Cut the stem/trunk as close to the ground as possible and cover the entire stump with herbicide as soon as possible after cutting. Apply a solution of (120g triclopyr/l of oil or product containing triclopyr and picloram 50ml/L water mix). Apply the mixture over the entire exposed surface of the cut stump, i.e. top and sides.
3. Foliar spray - Apply Glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide at a rate of 20ml/L or to cover entire plant OR triclopyr (600g/L active ingredient) herbicide at a rate of 6ml/L. Note: overspray will kill other (desirable) plants.
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?
Monitor the site and treat regrowth from roots and seedlings. Search out and remove the source of the infestation. Where appropriate replant the site with local native species.