Moth plant

Araujia hortorum

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Asclepiadaceae (asclepia)

Also known as
Araujia sericifera, kapok vine, mothvine, cruel plant, milkvine, milk weed, wild choko vine, *Physianthus albens*

Photo: Trevor James

Where is it originally from?
Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay

What does it look like?
Rampant, evergreen vine (<10 m tall) with smelly, milky sap and twining flexible stems that are covered in down and woody near the base. Dark green leaves (3-12 x 2-6 cm) are hairless and dull on the top, greyish-downy underneath, and opposite on the stems. Clusters of 2-4 bell-shaped white flowers (20-25 mm diameter Dec-May), occasionally with pink streaks, are followed by distinctive thick, leathery, pear-shaped choko-like pods (10 x 7 cm) containing kapok-like pulp, which splits open to disperse many black, thistledown-like seeds.

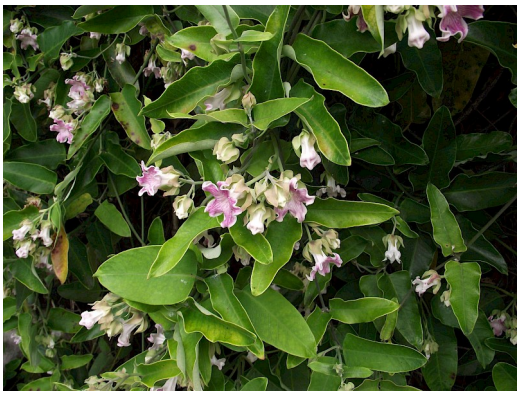

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

Are there any similar species?
Choko fruit is similar but leaves are more grape-like.

Why is it weedy?
Rapid growth to canopy, forming large, heavy, long-lived masses. Produces masses of viable seeds that can drift long distances on air currents. Tolerant of shade, very tolerant of drought or damp, wind, salt, many soil types, and damage, but is frost tender. Poisonous and irritant-inducing (not grazed).

How does it spread?
Wind spreads seed from gardens, roadsides, orchards, hedges, plantations, vacant and industrial land.

Photo: Trevor James

What damage does it do?
Germinates in light wells or semi-shade inside established forest, often long distance from seed source, and smothers and kills plants up into the canopy, preventing the establishment of native plant species. Feeding parts of butterflies drinking from the flowers become gummed up, leading to eventual starvation and death.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Intact and disturbed forest and margins, tracks, coastline, cliffs, shrublands, mangroves, inshore and offshore islands, almost any frost-free habitat.

What can I do to get rid of it?
Note: Check with your local regional council first. This is classed as a pest plant in some regions and the council may be responsible for its control.
Poisonous, causes dermatitis, protect skin against contact with sap.
Destroy ripe pods first to minimise seeding.
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. Remove all pods and dispose of at refuse transfer station, burn or bury deeply. Leave remaining cut material on site to rot down.
3. Foliar spray - Apply herbicide using a hand held sprayer/knapsack to plants <1m tall. Use the recommended adjuvant

shown on the label. Spray spring to autumn. Apply metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (3g) + glyphosate (100ml) + recommended adjuvant per 10L water
4. Gun and Hose - metsulfuron-methyl 600g/kg (30g) + glyphosate (1L)/100L water + label recommended adjuvant. OR Apply Picloram/triclopyr herbicide (picloram 100g/l and triclopyr 300g/l active ingredient) at a rate of 6ml/L to thoroughly wet all parts of plant. Note: Overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants These herbicides have residual activity in the soil which may leach through soil and kill other plants. Do not use under and around other (desirable) broadleaf plants. 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. Bared areas reseed profusely. Follow up 6 monthly, replant bare spots.