Climbing asparagus

Asparagus scandens

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Family
Liliaceae (lily)

Also known as
Myrsiphyllum scandens Synonym of *Asparagus scandens*

Where is it originally from?
South America

Photo: Trevor James

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.

Photo: Trevor James

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.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

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?
1. Physical removal - Hand pull or dig out entire plant - Ensure all root material is removed to prevent regrowth. Dispose of tubers to refuse.
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 picloram gel (43g/l strength) to the entire cut stem. Do not use picloram near desirable plants or over water or wetlands. When a gel is inadequate commercial formulations (120g triclopyr/l of oil) or a solution of diesel and triclopyr (20:1 diesel:triclopyr) can be used. Apply the mixture over the entire exposed surface of the cut stump, i.e. top and sides.
3. Foliar spray - Lightly apply Glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide (15ml/L) + penetrant (as per label recommended rate) to entire plant. This rate can be increased to 20ml/L in winter for harder to kill plants. To avoid off-target damage to host trees pull the vegetation off tree trunks and spray on the ground.
Note: Overspray may kill other (desirable) plants. Glyphosate has been successfully used at lower rates (as low as 5-10ml/L and without penetrant) in Northland. If off-target damage is a possibility, a lower rate should be considered. DO NOT use penetrant if spraying against tree trunks or over desirable plants as this will increase the likelihood of off-target damage. Not for use near water bodies or wetlands - check with your regional council 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?
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.