Houttuynia

Houttuynia cordata

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Saururaceae (lizard's tail)

Also known as
Chameleon plant, ground ivy

Where is it originally from?
Asia

What does it look like?
Dense, deciduous (semi-evergreen in warm areas) groundcover herb (<1 m) with slender couch-like rhizomes and creeping stems which dies back to rootstock over winter. Heart-shaped leaves (<7 cm long) with peppery scent when crushed are usually variegated cream, bronze, scarlet and green, but quickly reverting to green. Small flowerhead spike with minute flowers and 4 white bracts ('petals') at the base (Dec-Feb).

Are there any similar species?
Ivy has similar leaves but woody stems.

Why is it weedy?
Rapid growth rate, creeping rhizomes, produces seed without pollination. Tolerates hot or cold, fully submerged to dry sites, shade to full sun, damage, grazing, most soil types but prefers damp shaded sites.

How does it spread?
Rhizome fragments, possibly seeds, spread by dumped vegetation.

What damage does it do?
Not yet naturalised in NZ, found only in gardens. Massive potential threat to bush, wetlands and other natural areas throughout New Zealand. Normally a bog plant, forms dense ivy-like groundcover 1m deep in full shade on land.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Wetlands, freshwater margins, damp ground, forest, shrubland and fernland.

What can I do to get rid of it?
Report any naturalised sites of this plant to your regional council.
For infestations found in your garden, remove whole plant including all root material. Cover with weed mat and remove all seedlings as they appear.

Photo: Trevor James

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