Cat's claw creeper

Dolichandra unguis-cati

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Bignoniaceae (trumpet creeper)

Also known as
Macfadyena unguis-cati

Where is it originally from?
Central and South America

Photo: Trevor James

What does it look like?
Perennial vine with long stems (<15 m or more), often rooting at the nodes, and an extensive root system, producing large tubers from which individual climbing runners grow. Two leaflets and a three-clawed tendril grow from each leaf stalk, the hooked tendrils are used to climb supports. Juvenile plants have small leaflets (10-20 mm x 4-8 m) and mature leaflets are narrowly egg-shaped (5-16 cm x 1-7 cm) with both surfaces sparsely clad in scales. Clusters of 1-3 (or <15) large, tubular yellow flowers (4-8 cm long) are followed by dry, black, flattened seed capsules that are tapered at both ends (<95 cm x 1-2 cm) and contain winged seeds (1-2 cm x 4-6 cm).

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

Why is it weedy?
Grows vigorously into the forest canopy, produces abundant seed, is difficult to control, and can grow in a wide range of conditions, including drought.

How does it spread?
Seeds are wind-spread. A network of root tubers develop from stems touching the ground, with each tuber producing more runners, allowing the plant to form a progressively larger and denser mat on the forest floor.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

What damage does it do?
Climbs standing vegetation, smothering native trees and shrubs. It can cause the death of large canopy trees through a combination of weight and shading. It can smother the ground with a thick layer of runners, preventing native species establishing.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Riparian areas, forest and shrubland edges, and light gaps. It prefers fertile, well drained soils, but appears to tolerate most soil types.

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. Burn or dispose of tubers to refuse.
2. Cut and paste - Cut the stem as close to the ground as possible and cover the entire stump with herbicide as soon as possible after cutting. Apply either glyphosate gel (400g/l strength) or picloram gel (43g/L strength). Do not use picloram gel near desirable plants or over wetlands.
3. Foliar spray (knapsack rates below. Refer to label for gun and hose rates). Apply Glyphosate herbicide (360 g/L active ingredient) at 20ml/L to cover entire plant. Note: Glyphosate overspray will kill other (desirable) plants OR Apply Picloram/triclopyr herbicide (picloram 100g/l and triclopyr 300g/l active ingredient) at 6ml/L plus organosilicone penetrant (label rate) to thoroughly wet all parts of plant.
Note: Triclopyr and picloram are 'grass friendly' but overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants. Picloram has 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 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?
Monitor the site and treat any regrowth.