Fire tree

Morella faya

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Myricaceae (wax-myrtle)

Also known as
Myrica faya, candle berry myrtle

Where is it originally from?
Azores, Madiera and Canary Islands

What does it look like?
Evergreen shrub or small tree (<8 m) with branches covered with reddish hairs, and long, leathery, dark green, shiny, smooth, aromatic leaves (4-11 cm x 1-2.5 cm) tapered towards the base, with rolled edges that become serrated towards the rounded tip. Flowers are on short, branched spikes amongst the current year's growth; male flowers are in small, hanging clusters near the branch tip, while small, hanging clusters of female flowers are further from the branch tip. Red-black fruit is only slightly fleshy and is warty in appearance.

Why is it weedy?
Overseas it is a fast-growing tree that forms dense invasive colonies, out-competing native species. Tolerates partial shade, a wide range of soil types from thin ash over lava to deep well-developed silty clay loam, and is a nitrogen fixer so it can colonise poor soils. Wind-pollinated, and seed production is prolific (from 40,000 to 400,000 fruits per year); seed remains viable in the soil for a long time. Not yet naturalized in mainland New Zealand.

How does it spread?
Fruit is spread by birds and animals.

What damage does it do?
Invades early regenerating forest and shrublands, and alters the chemistry of the soil by fixing nitrogen, allowing for subsequent invasion by other weeds. Forms a dense canopy with a sparse understorey by shading-out other species and preventing canopy regeneration.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Light gaps in forests, forest edges, agricultural areas, disturbed areas.

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - pull seedlings and dig out small plants or excavate larger areas. Burn all plant material or dispose of to refuse.
2. Cut and paste - Cut the stem/trunk as close to the ground and cover the entire stump with herbicide as soon as possible after cutting. Apply glyphosate gel (120g/L strength)
3. Drill or frill - Drill downward sloping holes around the circumference of the trunk about 8-10 cm apart, or Frill (make deep cuts into the sapwood at regular intervals around the base of the tree, taking care not to ring-bark the plant). Fill the holes with undiluted 'neat' glyphosate (360g/L active ingredient) or saturate the frill cuts with glyphosate (360g/L active ingredient) mixed at 250ml/L
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 for regrowth from the base and seedling growth.