Coral tree

Erythrina xsykesii

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Fabaceae (pea)

Also known as
Flame tree

What does it look like?
Large, spreading, deciduous tree (<12-18 m tall). Trunks have light coloured bark, and scattered, tapering spines (5-10 mm long). Round twigs with prickles and long, bright green, broad-oval to heart-shaped leaves (10-20 cm long) both start out hairy, then become smooth as they mature. Large dark orange pea-like flowers (50-60 mm long) cluster on branch tips (Aug-Oct), but no seed pods are formed.

Photo: Trevor James

Are there any similar species?
Another coral tree (*Erythrina crista-galli*) with dark red flowers and narrow-oval leaves (6-12 cm long) is commonly cultivated.

Why is it weedy?
Sterile hybrid so sets no seed, but all stems root upon contact with ground, forming dense stands. Grows rapidly, lives a long time and replaces canopy trees. Possibly allelopathic. Tolerates a wide range of conditions ? hot to warm, wet to dry, fertile to very poor soils, and little shade.

Photo: Trevor James

How does it spread?
Stem fragments dropped or planted from gardens, roadsides, and greenwaste dumping.

What damage does it do?
Forms tall, spreading canopy, preventing native plants from establishing. Leaf litter and fallen branches under it stop other plants growing.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Coastal areas, wetlands, bush and shrub margins, open sites in low-frost areas.

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Physical removal - dig out small plants or excavate larger areas. Burn all plant material or dispose of to refuse.
2. Cut and paste (all year round) - 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 either metsulfuron gel (10g/l strength) or picloram gel (43g/l strength) to the entire cut stem.
3. Basal spray stems up to 20cm diametre with X-Tree Basal. Ensure the base is thoroughly covered at ground level.

Photo: Trevor James

4. 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 or saturate the cuts with metsulfuron-methyl 600 g/kg (20-50g/L + penetrant).
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?
Always treat standing plants, do not cut down as all stems root profusely. All treatments best in late summer-autumn.