

Bittersweet

Solanum dulcamara

Family

Solanaceae (nightshade)

Also known as

bitter nightshade

Where is it originally from?

Eurasia, North Africa

What does it look like?

Scrambling or sprawling, vine-like perennial (<2 m tall) with branched, usually hairless stems (<4 m long) that are woody towards the base and have corky, raised glands. Hairy oval leaves (4-12 cm long x 2-8 cm wide) have pointed tips and up to 4 small lobes or leaflets at the leaf base. Clusters of 10-25 potato-like flowers with yellow centres and backwards-bending purple petals (Nov-Mar) held on a long stalk (<13 cm) are followed by egg-shaped berries (8-15 mm diameter) that mature from green through yellow to shining bright scarlet and contain seeds (2-3 mm).

Are there any similar species?

Jerusalem cherries (*Solanum diflorum*, *S. pseudocapsicum*) are small, bushy evergreen shrubs with white flowers.

Why is it weedy?

Produces many viable seeds, grows fast, and spreads vegetatively in all directions, smothering the ground and small shrubs. Tolerates shade, and is poisonous so is not grazed by stock.

How does it spread?

Seed is spread by birds.

What damage does it do?

Smotheres the ground and small shrub layer in disturbed forest, reducing light levels to native plants and seedlings, and preventing regeneration.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?

Disturbed forest, scrub, forest margins, riparian zones, plantations and urban areas.

What can I do to get rid of it?

Hand pull small seedlings and small infestations (all year round): mulch.

What can I do to stop it coming back?

Monitor the site and treat any regrowth or seedlings. Plant local native trees and shrubs to produce dense shade.



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Photo: Trevor James



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