Inkweed

Phytolacca octandra

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Phytolaccaceae (inkweed)

Where is it originally from?
Tropical South and Central America

What does it look like?
Bushy, spreading, hairless, smelly, perennial subshrub (<2 m tall, more if supported) with a very deep, pliable taproot. Hollow and brittle stems are softly woody near base, usually reddish, much branched, with numerous white dots of crystalline calcium oxalate inside. Narrow-oval leaves (40-150 x 15-50 mm) are alternate and light green when young, but occasionally turn reddish in autumn. Dense, erect, cylindrical flower clusters (up to 7 cm long, Nov-Aug) turning from green to pink are produced along the main stem, followed by succulent, purple-black berries (8 mm in diameter) with dark red juice containing seeds.

Photo: Trevor James

Are there any similar species?
Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana* and *P. clavigera*) is similar but has much bigger leaves and flowering/fruiting clusters.

Photo: Trevor James

Why is it weedy?
Grows and matures quickly, producing many well dispersed, long-lived seeds. Tolerates damage, wind, fire, all loose soils, and wet to moderately dry conditions, but is intolerant of deep shade, deep humus and heavy frost. Toxic, so stock avoid it.

How does it spread?
Birds, soil and occasionally water movement spread the berries containing the seeds. Seed sources include infested waste places, neglected crops, and disturbed, burnt or sprayed farm or conservation land.

What damage does it do?
Competes for space and nutrients in pioneer plant communities, and can temporarily inhibit the establishment of seedlings of native plant species. Normally followed by native species, but can also be followed by vines or other weeds.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Heavily disturbed forest and shrubland, short tussockland, bare land, cliffs, coastline inshore and offshore islands, and riverbeds.

What can I do to get rid of it?
Regenerating shady sites (or where groundcover is becoming dense) can normally be left uncontrolled as the weed will eventually be crowded out.

Photo: Trevor James

1. Physical removal - Pull or dig seedlings (all year round). Leave on site to rot down.

2. Cut and paste - 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 glyphosate gel (120g/L strength) or metsulfuron gel (10g/l strength) to the entire cut stem.

3. Foliar spray - Apply herbicide using a hand held sprayer/knapsack to plants <1m tall, or gun and hose for larger infestations. Use the adjuvant recommended on the label.
Apply glyphosate (360 g/L active ingredient) herbicide at at rate of 20ml/L plus organosilicone penetrant (2ml/L) to cover entire plant. Note: Glyphosate overspray will kill other (desirable) plants.

OR apply metsulfuron herbicide (600g/kg active ingredient at 0.5g/L knapsack or 20g/100L gun and hose) + organosilicone penetrant (3ml/L). Note: Metsulfuron overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants and has residual activity in the soil which aids in killing below ground parts.
In a pasture situation apply picloram/triclopyr herbicide (picloram 100g/l and triclopyr 300g/l active ingredient at 6ml/L) to thoroughly wet all parts of plant. Note: Triclopyr and picloram herbicides are 'grass friendly' but overspray will kill other (desirable) broadleaf plants. Picloram has residual activity in the soil which may leach and kill other plants. Do not use under and around other (desirable) broadleaf plants.

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.