Mothplant

Araujia hortorum

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Asclepiadaceae (asclepia)

Also known as
Araujia sericifera, kapok vine, mothvine, cruel plant, milkvine, milk weed, wild choko vine, *Physianthus albens*

Where is it originally from?
Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay

What does it look like?
Rampant, evergreen vine (<10 m tall) with smelly, milky sap and twining flexible stems that are covered in down and woody near the base. Dark green leaves (3-12 x 2-6 cm) are hairless and dull on the top, greyish-downy underneath, and opposite on the stems. Clusters of 2-4 bell-shaped white flowers (20-25 mm diameter Dec-May), occasionally with pink streaks, are followed by distinctive thick, leathery, pear-shaped choko-like pods (10 x 7 cm) containing kapok-like pulp, which splits open to disperse many black, thistledown-like seeds.

Photo: Trevor James

Are there any similar species?
Choko fruit is similar but leaves are more grape-like.

Why is it weedy?
Rapid growth to canopy, forming large, heavy, long-lived masses. Produces masses of viable seeds that can drift long distances on air currents. Tolerant of shade, very tolerant of drought or damp, wind, salt, many soil types, and damage, but is frost tender. Poisonous and irritant-inducing (not grazed).

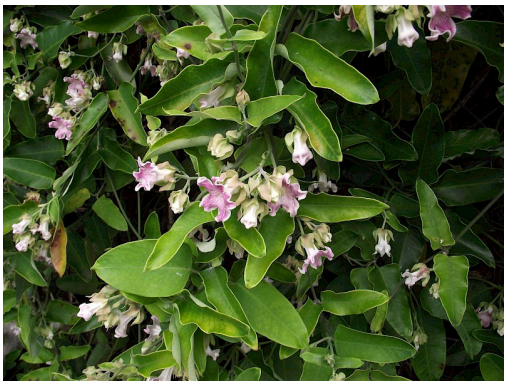

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

How does it spread?
Wind spreads seed from gardens, roadsides, orchards, hedges, plantations, vacant and industrial land.

What damage does it do?
Germinates in light wells or semi-shade inside established forest, often long distance from seed source, and smothers and kills plants up into the canopy, preventing the establishment of native plant species. Feeding parts of butterflies drinking from the flowers become gummed up, leading to eventual starvation and death.

Photo: Carolyn Lewis

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Intact and disturbed forest and margins, tracks, coastline, cliffs, shrublands, mangroves, inshore and offshore islands, almost any frost-free habitat.

What can I do to get rid of it?
Poisonous, causes dermatitis, protect skin against contact with sap. Destroy ripe pods first to minimise seeding.
1. Pull up seedlings (all year round).
2. Stump swab (best in summer-autumn): a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (100ml/L) or a product containing 200g 2,4-D+100g dicamba/L (200ml/L) or dicamba 50g/L (400ml/L). Remove all pods and dispose of at refuse transfer station, burn or bury deeply. Leave remaining cut material on site to rot down.
3. Spray (summer-autumn): a product containing 100g picloram+300g triclopyr/L (30ml/10L) or a product containing 200g 2,4-D+100g dicamba/L (12ml/L) or dicamba 50g/L (24ml/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?
Stumps resprout. Bared areas reseed profusely. Follow up 6 monthly, replant bare spots.