

Pest of the month

Some pests have escaped from gardens

Many of the remnants of New Zealand's native ecosystems are under threat from weeds. From an estimated 30,000 plants that have been introduced into New Zealand since European settlement, about 2,500 have formed wild populations and more than 300 plants have become major environmental pests. Some well-known examples are:

- **Old Man's Beard** in shrublands and the margins of forestlands
- **Banana Passion Vine** in many of our gully systems smothering shrubs and trees
- **Wandering Jew** in shaded situations under forest canopies
- **Barberry** on many of our reverting hillsides

Pest plants have the ability to smother trees and shrubs and prevent regeneration in wetlands, coastal areas, riparian areas and forest margins and remnants.

About 75 percent of New Zealand's terrestrial weeds and 50 percent of its freshwater weeds are thought to have established after escaping from gardens. Each year an average of eight garden plant species become naturalised into the wild.



Old Man's Beard



Banana Passion Vine

These pests usually have one or more of the following characteristics that allow them to successfully compete with native plants:

- tolerate a wide range of soil and climatic conditions
- rapid growth rates
- prolific seed producers and effective means of seed distribution (wind, birds, animals, water, gravel, clothing or footwear, vehicles)
- seed that can remain viable for many years
- the ability to grow from stem fragments, roots or seed heads
- difficult to control with conventional methods

The National Plant Pest Accord has been an effective means of identifying potential pest plants before they are introduced into New Zealand as garden plants. However, there are many existing plants in gardens that have the ability to establish and spread in the wild. To avoid spreading pest plants, gardeners are asked to:

- recognise potential pest plants in gardens and remove them
- take care when disposing of garden plants. Bury them or use a recognised disposal site (landfill or transfer station) but don't dump them
- purchase garden plants that will not become pests

A booklet titled **Plant me Instead** provides a series of attractive alternatives, native and introduced, to many common pest plants in region. It is available from Council and Department of Conservation offices.