

WELCOME TO THE AWHITU PENINSULA: Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Plant Pests

protecting our past :: planning our presence :: feeding our future

Coming to live here? Looking for land or a home here? Just visiting?



Awhitu Peninsula Landcare welcomes you, and invites you to use the information in this, and the other broadsheets available:

What is the Awhitu Peninsula?
Land, Wind and Water
Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Animal Pests

Pests can be defined as animals or plants in the wrong place – and the Awhitu Peninsula has many of them! Auckland has sometimes been called the Weed Capital of the World, because plants have been brought here from almost every part of the world, and, without natural controls from their home countries, many have flourished excessively.

The Awhitu Peninsula Landcare group has, since its beginnings in 1994, been involved in identifying and advising on control methods for weeds. From late 2004 till early 2008 we ran a very successful coordinated pest control project, supported financially by the Department of Conservation. We have had on-going cooperation and substantial assistance from the Auckland Regional Council, particularly the local Biosecurity Officer.

In choosing which plant pests to describe, we have ignored common annual garden and pasture weeds which often have positive uses, and which most gardeners and farmers know how to manage. Our concern here is invasive weeds which threaten the biodiversity of the Peninsula, or which may cause problems for animal or human health.

We hope all newcomers, as well as present residents, will join our ongoing campaign against pests, and help to create new ways of making the environment healthier, more productive and sustainable for everyone on the Awhitu Peninsula.



There are many plants that cause problems on the Awhitu Peninsula – here we list only a few of the most annoying ones. Others will be identified at “Weed Workshops” organised by Awhitu Peninsula Landcare, and pictures and brochures are available from the Awhitu Information Office.

Some, especially when young, can be managed without spraying; all can be controlled with one herbicide or another. You will find the local ARC Biosecurity Officer, Chris Katterns (ph: (09) 237-1004), very helpful in identifying plants, and helping you make the best decisions about weed management on your land.

1. Climbing asparagus (*Asparagus spp.*)



There are two varieties of asparagus designated as pests in the National Pest Plant Accord: smilax (*Asparagus asparagoides*) and climbing asparagus (*A. scandens*).

Climbing asparagus (sometimes called the Old Man’s Beard of the north) is a particular problem on the Peninsula because it forms a dense ground cover in shady areas, preventing forest regrowth, and also spirals up existing plants, suffocating them. It spreads as a creeper by taking root at nodules, by underground corms, and by orange berries which birds love.

If you see small plants, you can dig them out. But any corms left in the ground will re-sprout, and you will probably need to spray with a systemic herbicide.

2. Woolly nightshade (*Solanum mauritianum*) – also known as tobacco weed or tree



This woolly-leaved shrub is from the same family as many food plants (potatoes, tomato, eggplant) but has a mild toxic effect. It can also cause skin irritation in some people. It forms dense stands that inhibit native regrowth, and also invades pasture.

Small plants should be pulled out as soon as you see them. Larger plants should be cut just above ground level, and the stumps have a herbicide applied.

3. Pampas (*Cortaderia* spp.) and purple pampas - sometimes confused with the useful native toetoe

Pampas (*Cortaderia selloana* and *C. jubata*) are giant clump-forming grasses that can grow to 3 - 4m. They spread widely and rapidly, and suppress the growth of other species, creating a fire hazard and habitats for possums and rats. They need to be cut, burnt or dug out with a tractor, and regrowth sprayed with a herbicide.



4. Wild Ginger (*Hedychium* spp.)



With leaves like canna lily, and a large yellow flower with a beautiful perfume, kahili ginger (*H. gardnerianum*) and yellow ginger (*H. flavescens*) are handsome plants. However, they have large, branching tuberous roots that form dense mats up to a metre thick, and form big colonies in native bush, totally preventing native shrubs and trees from growing. They spread by root and by seeds, and should be exterminated wherever they are found, using appropriate systemic herbicides.

5. Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)

This feathery-leaved pasture plant with yellow daisy-like flowers can poison grazing animals, and should be grubbed or sprayed when it appears.



6. Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)



Introduced as a hedge plant from the northern hemisphere, gorse has gone wild in our climate. There is still one heritage gorse hedge on the Peninsula; you'll see it around the farm on the corner of Boiler Gully and Graham's Beach Road. All the rest you see is probably a nuisance.

However, unlike the plants mentioned above, gorse can also have some uses during the process of revegetating an area with native bush. On crumbly slopes it holds soil and prevents erosion, and it fixes nitrogen in the soil. It can act as a barrier against possums and grazing animals. Bees make good honey from its flowers, and its timber can be used for furniture, woodturning and firewood. Because it only grows in sunny places, it will eventually be shaded out by native bush.

But in pasture, near neighbours, on road edges, or if it is too large and overshadows natives, it can be a major problem. It spreads and grows rapidly from seeds, and the seeds can last in the ground for 50 years or more. Planting

fast-growing exotics such as pines or cypresses into lines cut through gorse is one way of dealing with it. Grubbing followed by hard grazing (especially by goats – although we don't advise herds of goats on this sand country!) is another. But spraying with an appropriate herbicide is the most effective method of control.

7. Garden escapees

There are a number of popular garden plants that escape and cause problems, for example:

- ❖ Agapanthus (*Agapanthus praecox*) looks pretty with its blue or white flowers in summer, but it blocks drains and culverts, and invades the edges of bush. Cut its seed heads off after flowering and you can keep it under control.



- ❖ Jasmine (*Jasminum polyanthum*) smells lovely – but it will cover your whole house eventually if you don't cut it back hard – and it writhes its way up trees and smothers them.

There are a large number of other plants which can spread rapidly in bush and waterways – it is worthwhile looking carefully at the Auckland Regional Council pamphlet, **Plant Pests of the Auckland Region**, which is available at the Awhitu Information Office or on the ARC website:

<http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/fms/main/Documents/Environment/Plants%20and%20animals/pest%20plants.pdf>



Many of us do not like using poisonous herbicides. Wherever possible, hand removal is our preference.

But even committed organic growers sometimes find they have to use herbicides if they are attempting to revegetate areas formerly in pasture, or weed-infested gullies.

The key issue in herbicide use is safety – so before attacking weeds with a sprayer, please:

- ❖ make sure the herbicide is the least toxic one that will do the job
- ❖ follow the instructions carefully (more is not better – too high a concentration may burn off the leaves without destroying the roots)
- ❖ ring-bark or cut down, and paint wounds or stumps with a liquid or gel, in preference to spraying, if you can
- ❖ spray close to the target plant and when there is no wind blowing (saves spray as well as other plants)
- ❖ always consider neighbours and do not spray when the wind is blowing towards them. Many sprays will affect newly budding plants and young vegetables. If your spray affects a neighbour's plants, you can be fined for "Chemical trespass".
- ❖ do a GrowSafe course and get your Approved Handler's Certificate for using chemicals safely (you can't buy more than a limited amount of some herbicides without this). Awhitu Peninsula Landcare arranges courses on the Peninsula each year.



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Produced by Awhitu Peninsula Landcare members Charmaine Pountney (text) and Helen Adcock (design and layout) with help from members of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare, Ngaati Te Ata, ARC Biosecurity staff; APL Pest Control Project manager and the Awhitu Information Office manager.

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