



### ***Protoasparagus aethiopicus*** **ASPARAGUS FERN**

SEPTEMBER 2008

Asparagus Fern is one of the most common weeds in Sutherland Shire, infesting a wide range of ecosystems.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Asparagus Fern is identified by its bright green often-twisted stems. The stems are covered in clear prickles or spines 5 to 10 mm long. The leaves are small, green and elongated; 2 to 3 cm long, in clusters giving the plant its fern like appearance. Flowers are pale pink or white in colour, bell shaped, around 3 to 5 mm long and appear in spring and summer. The fruit is a round berry, at first green shifting orange to red when ripe.

Each 5 to 8 mm berry contains a single round black seed 3 to 4 mm in diameter.

#### **EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT**

The ability to abundantly produce seeds and flowers enables this plant to quickly invade and suppress other plants.

Asparagus Fern swiftly attacks any disturbed, cleared sites of vegetation. The plant has become a dominant ground cover, displacing native plants.

With its mat of fibrous roots and tubers, the plant has the ability to take over the soil, trapping water and nutrients and so reducing their availability to native plants.

#### **HABITAT**

Asparagus Fern is a shade-loving plant, and prefers a canopy environment although it can grow in open areas. The plant takes advantage of any open or cleared soils in the understorey. Once established Asparagus Fern has the ability to spread throughout its environment suppressing the native plants growing in the understorey. Asparagus Fern thrives near urban areas where there are ample spaces in open bushland and many disturbed edges.



Picture of flowers and fruit.

Source: Sutherland Shire Council

## ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION

A native of South Africa, Asparagus Fern was introduced into Australia in the late nineteenth century as an ornamental. Dispersal was initiated from the widespread sale of nursery stock. Whilst continued spread occurs through the illegal dumping of plant material into bushland, birds are now the primary disperser. They consume the juicy berries, which are very attractive to them, and can then pass seeds long distances from where they were consumed.

## DECLARATION

Asparagus Fern is an environmental weed in Sutherland Shire. It is important that environmental weeds are destroyed, as they can affect human health, or can be invasive in the natural environment killing the native flora and reducing the natural biodiversity. Native animals may also be affected due to the loss of their natural habitat.

## CONTROL

Dig out and remove the crown/rhizome (woody root) entirely and intact. The watery tubers and root system can be left in the soil. Herbicides can be used with care and according to the label instructions. Contact council for further details.

Replant the treated area with native plants or grasses.



Asparagus Fern dominates understorey vegetation.

Source: Sutherland Shire Council

For further information contact  
Bushcare or Greenweb Units  
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