



Araujia sericifera MOTH PLANT, MOTH VINE

SEPTEMBER 2008

Moth Plant is a garden escapee distinguished by its fleshy choko-like fruit and twining habit. Abundant milky sap exuded from damaged stems and leaves can be highly irritating if it contacts eyes or mucus membranes.

DESCRIPTION

- **Stems** are either grey or grey-green, round, varying in size although rarely thicker than a few centimetres.
- **Leaves** are opposite with a prominent mid vein. Leaf shape is oblong to triangular, 3-11 cm long, and 1-6 cm wide.
- **Fruit** are fleshy pear shaped (choko-like), 6-12 cm long and 3-7 cm wide. A blue-green pod initially, turning to brown, splitting to shed masses of white cotton-like seeds.
- **Seeds** are numerous; black, about 5-8 mm long and ending in a white tuft of silky hairs about 2-3 cm long.
- **Flowers** are perfumed, tubular, 0.8-1.4 cm long. Flowers are white to pale pink in summer.
- **Roots** are shallow, fibrous and woody sometimes branched.

EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Moth Plant climbs through any supporting vegetation, its dense growth smothers smaller vegetation and impedes over storey vegetation. It freely sets copious amounts of seed that may remain dormant for several years. Moth Plant is remarkably adaptable, able to germinate and grow in a wide variety of conditions. It is suspected to be poisonous to cattle, poultry and dogs. The sap can cause skin irritation and severe allergic reactions in susceptible people.

HABITAT

Moth Plant invades damp sclerophyll forest, coastal and riparian vegetation, gardens, waste places, plantations, orchards, forest margins, roadsides and rainforests. It does particularly well in damp soils and seasonally moist locations although once established can withstand hot, dry spells. Moth Plant can tolerate sun, shade, marginal frosts, drought, salt and wind and grows best in degraded and neglected landscapes.



Young Moth Plant.

Source: Sutherland Shire Council

ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION

Moth Plant is a native of southern Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. Major infestations exist in eastern NSW. It is also becoming more widespread in southern Victoria, particularly in and near Melbourne, and is occasionally found in South Australia and the ACT.

Moth plant also occurs in New Zealand, Europe, South Africa, Israel, and USA. A weed of wasteland and forests adjoining settlement it originated as a garden escapee.

DECLARATION

Moth Plant is a noxious weed in some areas of NSW but it is considered an environmental weed in the Sutherland Shire. It is still important to destroy environmental weeds as they reduce indigenous biodiversity. They do this by degrading the homes or habitat of indigenous plants and animals, thus contributing to the extinction crisis both locally and globally.

CONTROL

Moth Plant can be pulled out by hand, provided it is not anchored in rock or under tree roots.

- **Seedlings and small plants** can be hand pulled or dug out. Tops are likely to break away when pulled so if roots remain they should be dug out.
- **Large vines** - find the main stem and sever the top part of the plant, then pull out the main root. Where plants cannot be treated immediately, removing fruit before it ripens in summer-autumn can prevent spread. Fruit should be placed in bags and disposed of safely. An alternate approach is to use the Cut and Paint and Drill and Fill methods on older, larger stems. Follow up treatments for either method is often required. As regrowth will occur, undertake follow-up control within a year. Plants can be sprayed with non-selective or selective herbicides. Contact council staff for more information on herbicide use.



Moth Vine seed pods resemble chokos.
Source: Sutherland Shire Council

For further information contact
Bushcare or Greenweb Units
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