

Asparagus asparagoides

COMMON NAME

Smilax

FAMILY

Asparagaceae

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Monocotyledonous Lianes

NVS CODE

ASPASP

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not assessed

HABITAT

Terrestrial. Thrives in impoverished soils, bare rock and volcanic soils. Likes good drainage. Coastal areas, open rocklands, shrubland, roadsides, hedges, wastelands, inshore and offshore islands. Plants are typically found under tree canopies which is largely due to bird movement but also reflects greater seedling establishment in leaf litter and better growth in shaded or part-shaded environments.

FEATURES

Scrambling or twining perennial. White, fleshy, tuberous roots in dense clusters. Stems to 3 m, green or slightly woody, twisted, thin and wiry, branched. Leaves are actually cladodes (flattened leaf-like stems), solitary at each node, 10-35 x 4- 15 mm, flat, ovalish, pointed, with approx. 7 veins. Flowers greenish-white, 5-6 mm, July-Aug. Round red berry, 6-10 mm, 2-8 tiny black seeds.

SIMILAR TAXA

Leaf-like cladodes distinguish *A. asparagoides* from other *Asparagus* species.

FLOWERING

August, September, October

FLOWER COLOURS

White

YEAR NATURALISED

1905

ORIGIN

trop & S. Africa

ETYMOLOGY

asparagus: An old Greek name for this plant possibly derived from a- (an intensifier) and sparasso 'to tear', referring to the prickles of some species



Near Bulls. Aug 2006. Photographer: Colin Ogle



Close up of *Asparagus asparagoides*.
Photographer: ARC

Reason For Introduction

Ornamental

Life Cycle Comments

Winter perennial; in warm regions such as Auckland, the plant can remain in leaf all year. Seeds germinate in autumn or winter, in leaf litter and at soil depths of up to 10cm. Seedlings produce at least one tuber in their first year. New shoots emerge each year in autumn from the perennial root system. The root system eventually grows into an extensive "mat" of branching rhizomes and numerous fleshy tubers. The mat is generally 5-10 cm below the soil surface and up to 10cm thick making up most of the plants biomass. Shoots typically emerge from the soil in Autumn. The shoots scramble across the ground and climb shrubs and trees. The stems are twisting, grow up to 3 m in length and branch extensively. Plants take at least 3 years to reach flowering size. Bridal creeper leaves turn yellow and fall, and stems die back in late spring-early summer, as temperatures rise and soils become dry (National Weeds Strategy Report, 2001).

Reproduction

Reproduces from seed and from a short, thick rhizome which produces root tubers.

Seed

Most buried seed germinates and the remainder rot within 2 years. However, seeds on the soil surface may be viable for at least 3 years. Compared to other weeds, this species has a short-lived seedbank.

Dispersal

Berries are eaten by birds, and dispersed over long distances. Rhizomes spread along coasts and roadsides by soil and water movement and garden waste.

Tolerances

Shade tolerant, tolerant of all but the wettest soils. Can tolerate a wide range of pH. Fleshy tubers enable tolerance of low light intensities, drought, frosts and saline soils.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/asparagus-asparagoides/>