

Asparagus asparagoides

COMMON NAMES

smilax

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Lianes - Monocots

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

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.

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.

GENUS

Asparagus

FAMILY

Asparagaceae

AUTHORITY

Asparagus asparagoides (L.) Druce

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

August, September, October

YEAR NATURALISED

1905

ORIGIN

trop & S. Africa



Near Bulls. Aug 2006. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Close up of *Asparagus asparagoides*.
Photographer: Auckland Regional Council,
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REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental.

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.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Winter perennial; in warm regions such as Auckland, the plant can remain in leaf all year. Reproduces from seed and from a short, thick rhizome which produces root tubers. 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. 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). Berries are eaten by birds, and dispersed over long distances. Rhizomes spread along coasts and roadsides by soil and water movement and garden waste.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

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

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

NVS CODE

ASPASP

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

27 May 2026