Cobaea scandens

COMMON NAMES
cathedral bells

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Evergreen, climbing vine to 6 m. Stems angled, branch tips hook-like. Leaves alternate, usually in 3 pairs of leaflets (incl small basal pair). Leaflets oval, 4-12 x 2-5 cm, dark green above, whitish below; with branched, purplish when young, woody-at-base tendrils. Mid-rib has twining tendrils. Flowers bell shaped, 6-7 cm long, green and smelly when young, becoming deep purple, Dec-May. Seed capsule 55-85 mm long, with 10-15 mm winged seeds.

SIMILAR TAXA
This vine has distinctive large, round, purple lantern-like flowers, found on twining purplish stems. The fruit are large and oval from 6 to 10cm long, releasing winged seeds.

HABITAT
Terrestrial. Potential to become a major weed in tall and undisturbed forests, natural open areas, scrub, forest remnants, hedgerows, roadsides, riverbanks, gardens, shelterbelts and undisturbed native forests (ARC, PestFacts)

GENUS
Cobaea

FAMILY
Polemoniaceae

AUTHORITY
Cobaea scandens Cav.

FLOWERING
(August) September - May

FRUITING
September-May

YEAR NATURALISED
1946

ORIGIN
Central & South America

Cobaea scandens. Photographer: Department of Conservation, Licence: Public domain.

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REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Perennial

ETYMOLOGY
cobaea: Named by the Spanish botanist Antonio José Cavanilles (1745-1804) after the Spanish mssionary and naturalist Bernabé Cobo (1582-1657)
scandens: Climbing; from the Latin scandere; groth habit

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
COBSCA

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cobaea-scandens/

PDF DATE
27 May 2026