Solanum dulcamara

COMMON NAMES
bittersweet

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Unarmed, scrambling or sprawling perennial. Stems are usually hairless, with prominent raised lenticels; to 4 m long. Becoming woody towards the base. The leaves are ovate or broadly ovate, sometimes with up to 4 basal lobes or leaflets, which can be densely hairy, and a sharp leaf tip. Flowers are present as a flat or convex-topped inflorescence, or as loose panicles with 10-25 flowers present. The calyx is 2-3 mm long, divided nearly to the base with very shallow, hairy broadly triangular lobes. Flowers are purple, though sometimes white, and are narrow-triangular in shape, becoming recurved. Flowering occurs Nov-Mar. Characterised by bright scarlet shining almost ovoid berries, which contain seeds 2-3 mm diam.

HABITAT
Terrestrial.

GENUS
Solanum

FAMILY
Solanaceae

AUTHORITY
Solanum dulcamara L.

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November, December, January, February, March

YEAR NATURALISED
1924

ORIGIN
Eurasia, N Afr

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental.

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Solanum dulcamara. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative
Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

POISONOUS PLANT

The scarlet coloured berries of this plant are poisonous when eaten.

ETYMOLOGY

solanum: Derivation uncertain - possibly from the Latin word sol, meaning “sun,” referring to its status as a plant of the sun. Another possibility is that the root was solare, meaning “to soothe,” or solamen, meaning “a comfort,” which would refer to the soothing effects of the plant upon ingestion.

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

SOLDUL

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/solanum-dulcamara/

PDF DATE

27 May 2026