



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 322 N. Commercial St. Bellingham WA 98225  
(360) 715-7470 [www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds)

## OLD MAN'S BEARD

### *Clematis vitalba*

**THREAT:** Old man's beard, also called traveler's joy, is a native of Europe and southwest Asia. This creeping plant vigorously climbs over other vegetation and structures, and can be invasive along roadsides, river banks, forest edges and fencelines, and in gardens and disturbed forests. In New Zealand, old man's beard has become a major threat to native forests, covering entire trees and preventing regeneration in forest gaps. As each plant can produce over 100,000 seeds, which are spread mainly by wind and water, this clematis can spread quickly. It also has the ability to send down roots whenever a stem node touches the ground. In addition to its invasive nature, the sap of this plant can cause blistering when it contacts skin.

**DESCRIPTION:** Old man's beard is a climbing, deciduous plant. It is fast growing, with each stem capable of producing up to 30 feet of growth in one season. This vine has compound leaves, composed of 5 leaflets (1 to 3 leaflets on seedlings). It has creamy white, sweet smelling flowers with four petals. The feathery seed heads account for the common name of old man's beard. Older vines have stringy, furrowed bark, which is pale brown in color.



**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Old man's beard can be controlled through chemical and mechanical means, or a combination of both. Seedlings and small infestations can be dug by hand, although care must be taken to dispose of the plants so they cannot resprout. Several herbicides are effective in controlling this plant, but, as this is a climber, herbicides must be applied to avoid harming non-target plants. Another option is to cut the vines at ground or waist level, then spray after some regrowth has occurred. For large stems, the vine can be cut close to the ground and treated with an appropriate cut stump herbicide. Treatment of a site must be continued for several consecutive years to ensure complete control of any infestations.

Contact the weed control board for site specific recommendations.