

Old Man's Beard

Clematis vitalba

Buttercup Family

Non-Regulated Noxious Weed: Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Woody, perennial vine
- Deciduous, compound leaves, coarsely toothed
- Grooves along the stems can be felt when handling, especially on younger vines
- Small, creamy white flowers found in clusters
- In late summer and fall, feathery seed heads form which seen together resemble a long white beard
- Seed heads are persistent and are especially visible in the winter when the leaves have died back

Biology

- Vines can reach up to 100 feet long; will grow both as an aggressive climber and also along the ground
- Flowers throughout the summer
- Spreads primarily by seeds; each plant can produce more than 100,000 seeds annually
- Vine fragments can also take root and form new plants

Impacts

- In natural areas, it outcompetes native plants and will blanket shrubs and trees
- Can climb up to 60 feet into tree canopies, adding substantial weight to trees, which can contribute to blowdowns
- It forms thick mats that can accelerate rot and deteriorate structures
- Takes water and nutrients away from other plants
- Provides hiding areas for rats and other vermin

Distribution

- Found throughout King County; most abundant in urban and suburban forests, but also present along roadsides, river banks, gardens, fences and hedges
- Can grow in a wide range of conditions, from relatively dry to moist soils and from full sun to part shade



This escaped garden ornamental is an aggressive climber; young plants can grow 6 feet a year.

Named for its white, fluffy seed heads which disperse easily via wind and rain.



Vines can completely cover existing vegetation creating dense thickets of growth.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control
Program Line: **206-477-9333**
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*), the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes this plant as invasive and is encouraging landowners to remove it when possible and to choose alternatives for their landscaping needs. (See box to right.)

Control Methods

For best results, a variety of control methods should be employed throughout several growing seasons. When working in critical areas such as stream banks, care must be taken to minimize soil disturbance; any disturbed area must be stabilized to control erosion and sediment deposition.

Manual: For vines growing on the ground, the most effective control method is pulling or digging out plants and removing the roots. Fall to spring is usually the best time for this since the ground is moist. Vines may re-root if left on soil, so pile them up or discard with yard waste. **For vines growing in trees,** the key is separating the climbing vines from their roots. Clematis can only grow from roots in soil (it cannot root itself to tree bark). Cut and remove all vines to a comfortable height around the trunk of the tree. This will kill the upper vines; the lower vines will need to be pruned off the tree and pulled out of the ground. Try to minimize damage to tree bark. Mulch area afterward.

Chemical: Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. Herbicides should only be applied at the rates specified on the label. Foliar application is most effective after full leaf development in late spring and before flowering/seed set in the fall. Products containing the active ingredient glyphosate (such as in Round-up) can be sprayed on the leaves where it will translocate down to the roots. This process can take up to two weeks to complete, so wait and look for evidence of the plant dying back before removing vegetation that has been treated. Glyphosate will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with, so make sure not to drip on desirable plants. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredient triclopyr (such as Brush-B-Gon) work well for lawn or pasture areas as it won't harm grasses. For large woody vines, you can cut the stem and apply herbicide to both sides of the cut using the rate recommended for cut stump/stem treatment. Stem and root fragments should be collected and burned or disposed of since they can grow into new plants. Similar to a foliar application, do not cut down the treated vines until they have died completely. For questions about herbicide use, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program.

Alternative Climbers

Like the look and growing ease of Old Man's Beard, but don't want the invasive headaches? Want to do the right thing and remove it in your yard but don't know what to plant in its place?

The good news is there are several alternatives worth consideration.

Orange honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa*) is a colorful native that butterflies and birds love. Grows up to 30 feet tall and can take full sun to partial shade.



Native orange honeysuckle

Another alternative is Italian Clematis (*Clematis viticella* and cultivars). It comes in various flower colors and reaches up to 15 feet tall.

Other possibilities include Kiwi vine (*Actinidia kolomikta*), chocolate vine (*Akebia quinata*) and Japanese hydrangea vine (*Schizophragma hydrangeoides*).

For more alternatives, visit the Northwest Plant Guide at www.kingcounty.gov/gonative. This site offers many planting suggestions and gardening tips.