

Asparagus fern

Environmental
and Declared
Weed under the
Tasmanian
Biosecurity Act
2019



Asparagus fern
Asparagus scandens

Images: TL, TR, BR King Island Landcare

Asparagus fern is a perennial climber with wiry stems to 3 m long. Leaves to 15 mm long in 3s at intervals along stem. Flowers small, white-pinkish, 6 petals Aug-Oct. Fruit is a round, orange-red berry with 1 shiny black seed. Roots are tuberous, thin and fleshy and form a mat from a short-branched rhizome (crown). Seed may be viable in the soil for up to 3 years and possibly longer depending on climatic conditions.

Asparagus fern is one of three asparagus species that are declared pest species under the Tasmanian Biosecurity Act 2019 and Weed of National Significance across Australia

Impacts

Asparagus fern is an aggressive scrambling vine that is **highly invasive** and capable of **seriously degrading native biodiversity**. It smothers shrubs and ground-layer plants, forming dense foliage and persistent underground root systems that remain even after top growth is removed. These root masses suppress native seedling recruitment and can encourage secondary weed invasion.

Asparagus fern tolerates a wide range of habitats, particularly shaded bushland, forest margins, and coastal environments. **Early intervention is critical**, as large infestations are difficult and costly to eradicate. Ongoing follow-up control and site restoration are essential for successful long-term management.

How does it spread?

Asparagus fern spreads primarily by **seed**, which is readily dispersed by birds and water. Green waste dumping also spreads viable stems and berries and creates new bushland infestations. Plants form dense crowns and root systems, gradually spreading outward, creating thick mats. Unlike some other asparagus weeds, it mainly spreads by seed, not fragments, but its **underground crown allows it to persist and reshoot if cut**.

Removing Asparagus fern

By hand

Using minimum soil disturbance. Seedlings and small plants can be dug out using trowels and similar tools.

Large, well-established plants are harder to remove. First cut away climbing stems at ground level to get access to the crown (root mass). Use a digging tool to lever up the crown, then sever the roots leading away from the crown. **Do not leave the crown in contact with the soil**, as it can re-establish. The tubers are not reproductive and do not need to be removed. Root material can survive being dried for long periods. Removing crowns / root mats can create high levels of disturbance, which may prompt weed germination, so **follow-up control is usually necessary**.

Cut and swab

Cut stems as close to the ground as feasible and swab the cut immediately with herbicide. Results can be enhanced by gouging the top of the crown with a knife or secateurs and then painting the wound with herbicide. For 'frog-friendly' glyphosate, **application in autumn often shows better long-term results** as plant is actively translocating sugars to the crown, than in spring or summer, which can lead to regrowth. For a cut and swab concentration, one part 'frog-friendly' glyphosate to one part water mixture is a commonly effective mixture. Adding a non-toxic to the mixture is helpful as you can see where you have applied the herbicide.

Foliar spraying

Herbicide treatments are only effective if plants have sufficient above ground foliage and the plants are actively growing, which is **winter/early spring** (note: different timing than cut and swab method). All foliage needs to be wetted with herbicide. A mix of Metsulfuron 600 and glyphosate (frog-friendly) with a non-toxic penetrant and marking dye is used by the King Island Landcare group who are battling this weed on the island. Spray thoroughly and carefully on foliage until leaves are wet but not dripping. Always read the herbicide label and safety data information and follow all directions.

Weed Hygiene

Effective weed hygiene practices help prevent the spread of invasive weeds and protect both people and the environment during control activities.

- **Wear appropriate personal protective equipment**, including gloves, eye protection, long sleeves, and enclosed footwear. For herbicide spraying, a respirator is most important.
- **Minimise soil disturbance** to reduce the chance of buried weed seeds germinating.
- **Control outliers** first before tackling the main infestation.
- **Dispose of plant material responsibly**, (double bagging) ensuring that seeds or viable plant parts are not spread during transport or disposal.

More information

Visit the **Biosecurity Tasmania** website; www.nre.tas.gov.au/invasive-species/weeds/weeds-index/declared-weeds-index/asparagus, for herbicide use visit, www.nre.tas.gov.au/invasive-species/weeds/weeds-index/declared-weeds-index/asparagus/asparagus-herbicides-for-control, or your local **Council NRM Officer**, or **Cradle Coast NRM** for advice on identification and best-practice control methods in your area.