

About Old Man's Beard Clematis

Clematis vitalba is a deciduous, woody vine that can grow over 65 feet in length or height. The leaves are pinnately compound, consisting of usually 5 leaflets. The leaflet margins are usually entire, but variable and sometimes 3-lobed. Plants reproduce by fragmentation, rooting at stem nodes, and prolific amounts of seed (as many as 3,400 per sq. ft.). Seeds are primarily spread by wind, wildlife, water and disturbance. The common name, old man's beard, is from the seed stage of the flower, when a mass of white, feathery styles extend from the small hairy seeds, which aid in further dispersal.

Why control *Clematis vitalba*?

The rapid growth rate of the heavy vines can aggressively smother forbs, shrubs, and trees. The heavy biomass that forms in infested forest canopies creates hazards from falling debris, provides ladder fuel for wildfires, and also increases a tree's susceptibility to windfall. The dense growth of woody vines that forms in forest understories are exceedingly difficult to control once established. It provides extremely poor habitat for local wildlife and insects.

Before you begin:

Create a plan for restoration before removing weeds or disturbing the soil. *C. vitalba* seeds germinate much more easily on disturbed soil. If desirable vegetation is not present, newly exposed soil can be sown with native or non-invasive perennial grasses.



Flowers & leaves



Mature seeds



Infested trees, Eastsound

If you would like weed identification, site-specific control recommendations or additional noxious weed information, contact the San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Program.



San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Program 2020

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Special thanks to the Washington State & King County Noxious Weed Control Boards.

Old Man's Beard Clematis

(*Clematis vitalba*)

Class C Noxious Weed

(Control required in San Juan County)



Clematis vitalba Removal

By law, herbicides must be used in strict accordance with label instructions.

Research on effective and safe herbicide use is on-going and often contradictory. For more recent information contact the San Juan County Noxious Weed Control Program.

Timing

Removal is best done in winter or spring, when soils are moist, roots are easier to extract, and negative effects on off-target species are reduced. Attention should be given to ensure the small seeds are not scattered or carried offsite during removal, as they can easily adhere to clothing, equipment, or disperse in wind.

Tools for Clematis Removal

Please do not attempt to pull *C. vitalba* vines down from infested tree crowns. Hazard tree limbs and heavy Clematis debris can cause serious injury. We strongly recommend always using the proper protective equipment. Toxic if ingested, it may also cause dermatological reactions, which can be severe for some people.

- Gloves, protective clothing and eyewear; a hardhat may be advisable when working under heavily infested forest canopies
- Handsaw, chainsaw, loppers, brush cutter, claw mattock, shovel
- Appropriate herbicide and equipment, if needed

Manual and Mechanical Control

Pulling/Digging: Uproot seedlings and young plants when the soil is moist and loose. Follow vines back to their source and dig, firmly pull the stem near its base, or use a weed wrench. *C. vitalba* vines can produce roots when in contact with soil, and you may find that vines are rooted multiple times over considerable distances. Use a claw mattock or shovel to loosen the dirt around roots of plants before pulling them out.

Cutting: For young or low-growing plants, use a mower, brush cutter, or loppers to repeatedly cut above-ground vegetation. Cut mature vines a few feet above the ground and again at the base.

Keeping the cut vines out of contact with the soil will prevent them from re-rooting. Never attempt to pull mature vines from infested tree crowns.

The best time to cut is when the plant is in bud or flower stage, before producing seeds. Although effective in stopping seed production and reducing biomass, *C. vitalba* is **not eradicated by cutting**. Eradication will require additional manual, mechanical, cultural or chemical control efforts to achieve eradication.

Cultural Control

Competition: *C. vitalba* is shade-intolerant, and may be partially controlled in forest understories by repeatedly cutting climbing plants and maintaining a closed canopy.

Sheet mulching: Sheet mulching is effective in smothering and suppressing seedlings, but will not control mature vines.

Biological Control

Biological control agents have not been approved in the United States due to concerns for impacts on other *Clematis* species.

Targeted Grazing: Sheep can provide good control at ground level by grazing seedlings and young plants.

Chemical Control

Always follow label instructions to find the correct herbicide concentration and timing for your site and the method you plan to use.

Timing: In general, systemic herbicide applications are more effective in spring or in the fall, when soil is moist. Avoid using herbicides when soil is dry or plants are stressed. Adding a dye marker can help reduce the amount of herbicide applied.

Cut-stump treatment: Cut the vine at waist height and again at ground level before applying triclopyr or glyphosate to the cambium of both cut ends, which is the area around the edges of cut stems. Applications should be made immediately after cutting to ensure effect.

Spot spray: Advisable for low growing plants only. Glyphosate is most effective on new growth in the spring, after cutting back to waist height in the winter.

Triclopyr can be applied to foliage and stems any time plants are actively growing, except early spring. Aminopyralid, 2,4-D, and imazapyr should also provide good control.

Basal/Stem spray: In fall, apply high label rates of an oil-based triclopyr (BEE) to the basal portion of selected stems. An additional surfactant may be necessary for the active ingredient to penetrate the bark and enter the vascular system.

Follow-up

Disposal Methods: Woody debris can be chipped, burned, or placed on a tarp to dry out. To prevent rooting, never leave freshly cut vines in contact with the soil. Vines may cause chipper complications. Never use chipped material that may contain seeds as mulch.

Site Restoration: Mulch and/or re-seed bare ground with native or non-invasive perennial grasses as soon as possible after any ground-disturbing activities, to reduce erosion and subsequent weed invasions.

Other Noteworthy Clematis Species

If you enjoy old man's beard Clematis, please consider instead growing the similar, native, Western Clematis (*Clematis ligusticifolia*), or another non-invasive *Clematis* species. There is a wide variety of species and cultivars to choose from that lack the highly detrimental qualities of *C. vitalba*. Oriental Clematis (*C. orientalis*), a similarly invasive species, is a Class A Noxious Weed in Washington State that must be reported and eradicated if found.



Oriental Clematis (*Clematis orientalis*), Class A Noxious Weed