

Celastrus orbiculatus

COMMON NAME

Climbing spindleberry; oriental bittersweet

FAMILY

Celastraceae

AUTHORITY

Celastrus orbiculatus Thunb.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Hairless woody vine, deciduous with bright gold leaves in autumn; leaves alternate, serrate; flowers inconspicuous, green; fruit globose, 3-valved, yellow when ripe then splitting to reveal bright red arils surrounding the seeds. Reputedly, all parts are poisonous.

HABITAT

Terrestrial. This aggressive, perennial, woody vine climbs on rocks and trees and sometimes covers the ground and vegetation (Hutchison 2000).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Deciduous, hairless climber to 12 m high. Roots suckering. Stems round, woody, greyish-brown, layering. Young twigs green, often with sharp 1-2 mm spines. Leaves alternate, roundish, 5-10 cm long, finely serrated, yellowing before falling. Flowers insignificant, pale green. Seed capsule round, 6-8 mm diameter, yellow to orange, exposing scarlet arils.

"Flowers are small, greenish-yellow, and usually become unisexual by abortion or reduction of male or female parts, thus the plants are usually dioecious. Occasional vines develop both unisexual and perfect flowers and are then termed polygamo-dioecious. Another reported variation is occasional monoecious plants, i.e. with both male and female flowers on the same vine." <http://www.iucngisd.org/gisd/species.php?sc=156>

SIMILAR TAXA

The deciduous foliage is most evident in evergreen canopies in autumn when it turns golden yellow. *Celastrus* is closely related to *Euonymus*, but can be separated by the alternate leaves. Also similar is *Maytenus boaria*, but this species lacks petioles on the leaves.

FLOWERING

November

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

LIFE CYCLE

Seedlings can appear far from parent plants as seed is spread by birds. Most often seen in disturbed sites - forest edges and gaps, scrub or road sides.



Fruit. Whanganui. Apr 2011. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Celastrus orbiculatus. Photographer: Graeme La Cock, Licence: CC BY-NC.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Perennial. This species spreads vegetatively by underground roots that form new stems. Also reproduces via seed (Hutchison 2000). Shade tolerant and seedlings may stay suppressed for some time before release by disturbance (Hutchison 2000).

YEAR NATURALISED

1981

ORIGIN

NE temp Asia (Japan, Korea, China)

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental - the flexible stems are used to make wreaths.

TOLERANCES

Shade- and cold-tolerant in New Zealand, growing wild, e.g. near Taihape, Taupo, Turangi.

ETYMOLOGY

celastrus: From the Greek kelastros, an evergreen tree.

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/celastrus-orbiculatus/>