Old Man's Beard

Western Invasive Plant Fact Sheet #8

Clematis vitalba

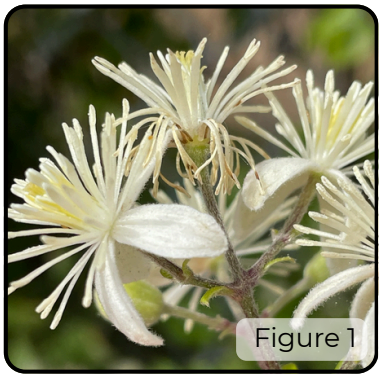

Figure 1

Figure 2

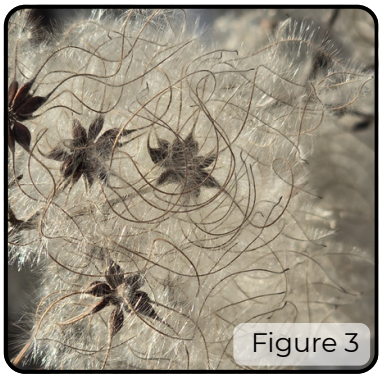

Figure 3

Figure 4

Scan or Click for more management information

Quick Facts: Old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba),* also known as traveler's joy or clematis, is native to Europe and western Asia. It is a perennial vine that can grow up to 90 ft. long and over 20 ft. per year, climbing over trees and toppling them with its weight. Clematis can also cover the ground, preventing other plants from growing and establishing. It grows in disturbed areas around forest edges with partial to full sun. These dense formations can reduce agricultural productivity through resource competition and crop contamination, and reduce biodiversity by replacing native flora. Old man's beard is a host for aphids and spider mites, acting as a reservoir for pests to invade crops if left untreated. This plant also increases wildfire risk and is toxic to people and livestock if consumed. Contact can also cause rashes and skin sensitivity for some people.

Invasion Strategy: Old man's beard establishes itself with a large taproot that can reach up to 10 ft. deep. This plant spreads primarily through seeds and stem fragments. Plants produce more than 100,000 seeds per year that can spread by wind, water, humans and animals and remain viable in the soil for up to five years. Additionally, stem fragments are capable of rooting and establishing new populations.

Identifying Features: Clematis is a climbing shrub with deeply grooved stems and deciduous leaves.

- Leaves are divided into leaflets (three to seven arranged in pairs with one leaf on top). The leaflets are oval shaped and pointed with a variety of shapes from smooth to toothed.
- The leaf stems (petioles) wrap around other plants to climb
- Young vines have six ridges that run down the length of the vine
- Mature vines have shredded, pale-brown bark.
- Flowers are creamy white and lightly sweet-scented. They technically lack petals, but have four to six white structures (sepals) which look similar to petals. The center of the flower is a cluster of white filaments.
- Seeds are hairy and white with feathery tails that allow them to float through air and water.

Old Man's Beard *Clematis vitalba*

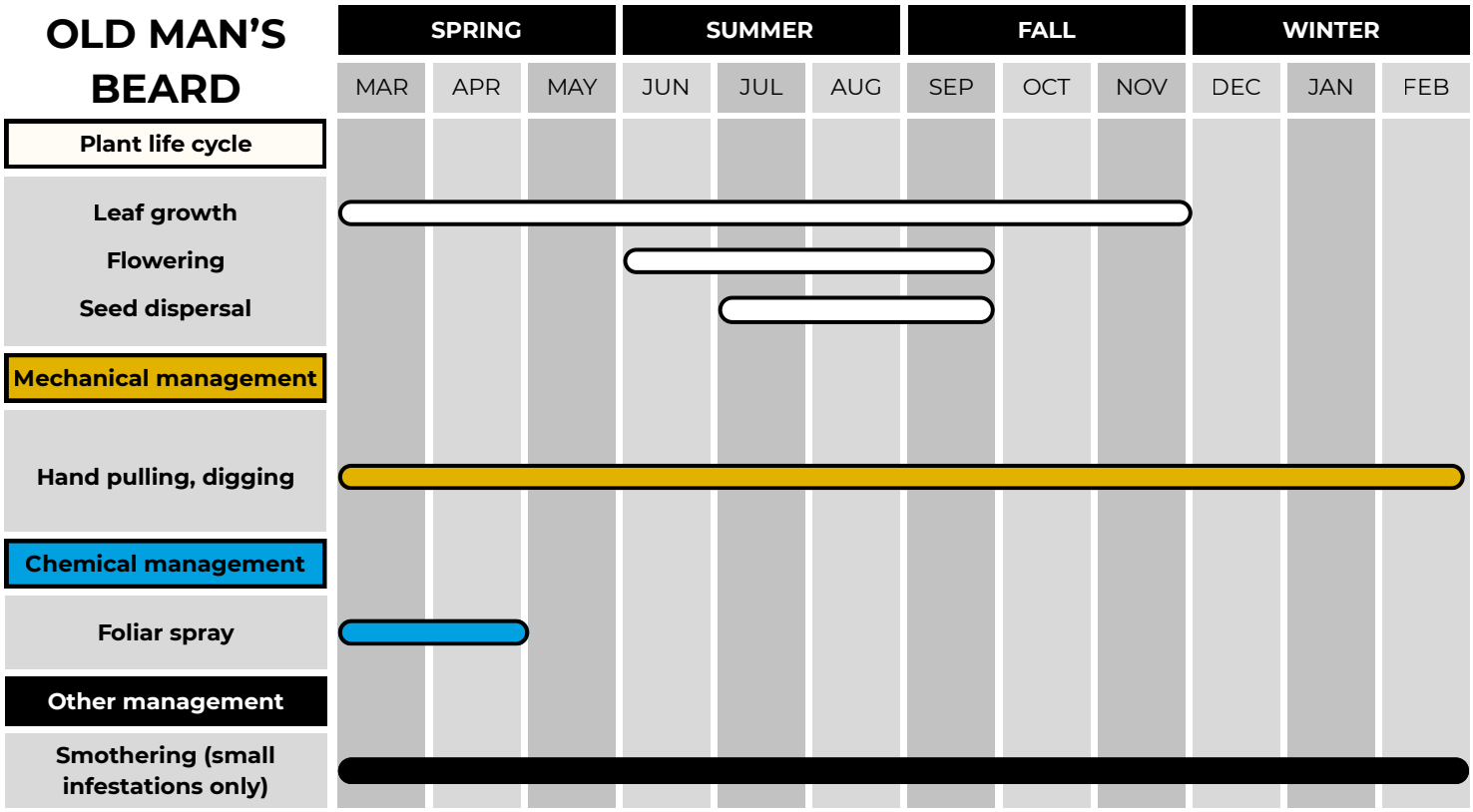

Table 1. This chart is based on USDA plant hardiness zone 7. Plant growth and treatment times vary by region.

Management Methods:

Mechanical - Repeated hand pulling can be effective in small areas. Prioritize removal when soil is soft to avoid leaving root fragments in the ground. Prevent soil contact after plants have been pulled, as they will resprout. Do not pull clematis off of trees. Instead, cut the vines at chest height down to the base of the tree trunk. This will starve the plant in the canopy.

Chemical - Foliar application of herbicide can be effective. Cut-and-paint methods of herbicide control are also recommended.

Disclaimer - Selecting the best management method for this plant can be site- and context-specific. Check with your local USDA Service Center or University Extension agent to explore your options and determine what is most appropriate for your location and situation.

Management Information:

Dispose of cut plant materials where they cannot resprout. If seeds are present, bag them and dispose of them in a landfill. Equipment should be cleaned after management. Personal protective equipment is recommended when removing any invasive species, and especially when using herbicides. Always follow label instructions when using herbicide!

Species present Absent

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Old Man's Beard *Clematis vitalba*

Look-Alike Species: Western white clematis (*Clematis ligusticifolia)* is native to the Pacific Northwest and may be confused with the invasive *Clematis vitalba*.

Western white clematis Native clematis (*Clematis ligusticifolia*) has vines that reach no more than 20 feet in length and flowers earlier in the season than invasive clematis. Invasive clematis is more common west of the Cascades, while native clematis is more common east of the Cascades. Additional identifying features of western white clematis include:

- Serrated leaflets with defined teeth on the edges
- Dioecious, meaning individual plants bear strictly male or female flowers.
- Flowers from January to June

Figure 5

Figure 6

References and Additional Reading:

- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board. Old man's beard, Clematis vitalba [Management information].
- King County Noxious Weed Control Program. Best Management Practices: Old Man's Beard [Management and phenology].
- Oregon State University - Solve pest problems. Clematis vitalba [Identification and management].
- Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbook. Clematis (Clematis orientalis) and old man's beard (Clematis vitalba) [chemical management]

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- Figure 1: iNaturalist, tomerler
- Figure 2: iNaturalist, juliakcarr
- Figure 3: iNaturalist, najah22
- Figure 4: West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District. Old man's beard or Traveler's Joy clematis
- Range map: USDA PLANTS Database
- Figure 5: iNaturalist, anthroveritas
- Figure 6: California Native Plant Society

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