

Moth Plant (*Araujia hortorum*)

Moth plant (*Araujia hortorum*), also called kapok plant or cruel plant, is a native of Argentina and Brazil and has been in New Zealand since 1888. It's well-established in the upper North Island and coastal Bay of Plenty, but may be expanding southward, into Te Puke and elsewhere. Like pampas, moth plant is a problem weed especially to the kiwifruit industry. Additional information about moth plant:

- Pods are being formed on vines now following the summer flowering period. Pods split open when dry, typically in June and July, releasing the seed with pappus attached. Seeds are thus wind-borne and travel for kilometres. The pappus could attach to kiwifruit fruit, but pods are unlikely to split open en-masse until after picking.
- Landcare Research has recently had approval from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to release two biological control agents onto moth plant – a beetle and a rust fungus. They may be very helpful in the medium-long term. Landcare Research is having some difficulty in obtaining permits from the Argentinian government to actually obtain the beetle and fungus – hopefully this will be resolved in coming months.
- BOPRC Regional Pest Management Plan: Restricted Pest definition: These are pests we want to reduce the further spread of and will support community and occupier efforts to control in places where they are a problem. Land owners and occupiers and agencies are responsible for managing and controlling these pests. Where they are a problem the Regional Council will support community and land owner and occupier efforts to control.
- Although moth plant is a serious nuisance to the kiwifruit industry, enforcement actions are not possible in the current Regional Pest Management Plan. Individual landowners are encouraged to control infestations on land they own or occupy and advice can be given on appropriate control methods. Appropriate management activities and rules regarding moth plant will be reconsidered when the next plan is developed. Stakeholders are encouraged to submit their thoughts to the Bay of Plenty Regional Council during the consultation process. Council has undertaken awareness, encouraged control and provided funding for biocontrol research.
- Control can be quite difficult – moth plant snaps off just below ground level if you pull it. It is then likely to regrow. Locating vines and digging them out works well – spring or early summer is the best time to control Moth Plant; in late summer or autumn the pods will be forming; drag any formed pods out of shelter trees. The sap can cause quite severe dermatitis, so workers need to wear gloves, protective clothing and eye protection. Cutting vines off within 20 cm of ground level and applying a strong glyphosate stump treatment mixture (1 part glyphosate to 5 parts water, plus a spreader such as Pulse) is the safest herbicide option for a shelter belt situation.

See images of Moth Plant below.



Photo 1: Moth plant (*Araujia hortorum*) leaves, flowers and developing seed pods



Photo 2: Moth plant seeds are trapped within shelter belts when flying in the wind over winter months. They then fall to the ground and germinate to infest the shelter belt the following summer.



Photo 3: An orchard team has recently cleared their shelter belts of moth plant in Welcome Bay.