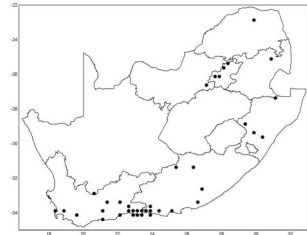


ARC-PPRI FACT SHEETS ON INVASIVE ALIEN PLANTS AND THEIR CONTROL IN SOUTH AFRICA

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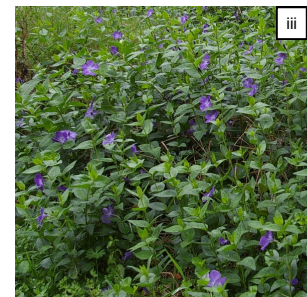


BLUE PERIWINKLE (*Vinca major*) is a perennial, evergreen, trailing shrub with attractive bluish flowers. The leaves are dark glossy green, oval, and up to 6 cm wide (i). The trailing stems that grow along the soil root at the nodes, while the erect flowering stems reach as high as 45 cm. In summer, these stems bear attractive blue to violet flowers with 5 petals (ii) that fuse at the base to form a tube. Although the plants do bear fruit, this is uncommon in cultivation, and plants generally spread vegetatively. Blue periwinkle is native to Europe and northern Africa, and was imported into South Africa as a garden ornamental. However, it has escaped garden cultivation to become invasive in some parts of the country. Blue periwinkle is a declared invader in South Africa and must be controlled, or eradicated where possible. A variegated form is also available, and has a similar, invasive habit.



THE PROBLEM

This popular garden plant is usually grown as a groundcover (iii). However, in gardens it tends to outgrow its original site then, when the pruned cuttings are thrown out in the garden refuse, the stems merely regrow and colonise the new area. Although blue periwinkle prefers moist, shaded areas, forest edges, streambanks and roadsides, it will also grow in full sun where there is sufficient moisture. Where infestations occur, the trailing stems form dense mats of vegetation - about half a metre high - that blanket surrounding plants, block out their light, and hamper their ability to obtain nutrients. Owing to its rampant growth and its ability to root from the trailing stems, blue periwinkle outcompetes the surrounding vegetation and, ultimately, alters the habitat. Since infestations tend to occur in fragile environments like forests and along streams, this has serious implications for biodiversity. Blue periwinkle is spread chiefly through human activity, but also by plant fragments that are washed downstream. The leaves contain toxins and are generally not browsed by animals.



THE SOLUTION

Small infestations can be removed by hand-pulling. However, all parts of the stems must be carefully removed since any fragments will merely regrow. No herbicides have been registered specifically for use on blue periwinkle. However, a systemic herbicide sprayed on the leaves may eventually translocate to the roots and kill the plants. Care should be taken to prevent spillage into streams, and to protect surrounding, indigenous plants. As with most invasive alien plants, the only sustainable solution is biological control. Unfortunately, no potential agent has been identified for use against blue periwinkle. In the meantime, gardeners and landowners are strongly urged to remove these plants, and replace them with indigenous plants such as the bush violets, *Barleria obtusa* and *B. repens*, or daisybushes, *Osteospermum* species (iv) which grow in similar situations. But other indigenous ideas are available here: <http://pza.sanbi.org/>.



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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