

# Pest of the month –

## White-edged nightshade and woolly nightshades

Two common species of woody nightshade have become pests in New Zealand.

White-edged nightshade (*Solanum marginatum*), a native of North Africa, was originally introduced as an ornamental plant during the 1880s. By 1883, it was reported to be growing wild and by the 1930s, it was common in waste areas about Auckland.

In the top of the South Island, there is a major infestation in the Marlborough Sounds covering almost 700 hectares.

In the Tasman-Nelson region, there are known sites in Dodson Valley and Brook Valley, on the Richmond foothills and in the Wairoa Gorge.

White-edged nightshade is a thorny, multi-branched perennial shrub or small tree growing up to 5 metres that can form dense, impenetrable thickets. The leaves are green with white edges and prominent white veins, with the lower surface being chalky-white and velvet-like. There are short, sharp, woody spines along the top and bottom of leaf veins, on the branches and the stem of the plant.

The flowers are white but sometimes pale mauve. Light brown seeds are contained in a large green berry up to 4cm in diameter which ripens to yellow. The berries are poisonous to humans and livestock and when plants are disturbed, fine hairs are released as a dust that can cause extreme irritation of the respiratory tract.

The seed appears to have a very long soil life.

Although the fruit is not particularly attractive to birds or other animals, this is one possible method of dispersal.

Most spread occurs through movement of the fruit in water or when soil containing the seeds is moved.

White-edged nightshade is a threat to pasture production on marginal land and therefore a threat to livestock production. It has the potential to become a problem in bush margins and will grow in a range of soil types.

White-edged nightshade is listed as a Progressive Control plant and all occupiers are required to destroy plants, with properties inspected annually. Small plants can be readily pulled or grubbed out as long as most of the taproot is removed. Large plants can be cut and the stumps treated or sprayed with a suitable herbicide.

Woolly nightshade (*Solanum maritimum*), a native of South America, is closely related to white-edged nightshade, but is not included in the Regional Pest Management Strategy because of its widespread distribution. Consequently, landowners are not required to control it.

Woolly nightshade is a pest of pastoral land, native forest margins and urban areas. It is a fast-growing shrub or tree up to 9m tall with large grey-green oval-shaped leaves that are covered with furry hairs. The leaves give off a strong kerosene-like smell when crushed. Purple flowers grow on clusters at branch ends, with green berries ripening to a yellow. The leaves shed fine hairs



*White-edged nightshade (Solanum marginatum).*



*Woolly nightshade (Solanum maritimum).*

when touched, and can irritate the skin, eyes, nose and throat.

For information on identification and control, contact a Biosecurity Officer, Ph 03 543 8400

Websites for plant pest information:

[http://www.arc.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity/search-for-plants/regional-plants\\_home.cfm](http://www.arc.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity/search-for-plants/regional-plants_home.cfm)

[http://weedbusters.co.nz/weed\\_info/weed\\_list.asp](http://weedbusters.co.nz/weed_info/weed_list.asp)