

# Asparagus ferns

Basket, climbing, feathered asparagus fern and bridal creeper



Asparagus ferns are popular garden ornamentals. They have escaped the garden and due to their invasive properties and the difficulty of removing them from bushland, gardeners should avoid planting all types of asparagus fern.

Seven species are listed as Weeds of National Significance.

## Legal requirements

All seven WoNS asparagus ferns are category 3 restricted invasive plants under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. They must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment.

Bridal creeper must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours of been sighted.

The Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks associated with invasive plants under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation (GBO). This fact sheet gives examples of how you can meet your GBO.

At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive plants in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on asparagus ferns. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.



**Queensland  
Government**

## Bridal creeper

Bridal creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*) is not climatically suited to most of Queensland, but has the potential to become a pest in cooler parts of southern Queensland, primarily found in gardens around Stanthorpe and Warwick. There are two forms, common bridal creeper and Western Cape bridal creeper. The Western Cape form has not been found in Queensland.

### Description

Bridal creeper is a scrambler, with wiry annual stems up to 3 m long. The stems form a zig zag pattern. Stems are covered with heart-shaped green leaves. Leaves are glossy green, solitary, alternate, broadly ovate 1–7 cm long and 8–30 cm wide. The root system is extensive with tubers (up to 7.5 cm long) arranged in a rosette around a rhizome that grows vertically in the soil. It produces clusters of small, cream-coloured flowers 8–9 mm in diameter. Fruits ripen to dark red 6–10 mm in diameter and each contains a single, black, shiny, round seed, 3–4 mm in diameter.

## Asparagus fern

Asparagus fern (*Asparagus scandens*), is a wiry climber. It generally occurs in subtropical to temperate high rainfall regions. Plants appear to need moisture all year round and favour riparian habitats. There are records of asparagus fern in south east Queensland and it has the potential to spread further North and West.

### Description

Asparagus fern has long, flat branching thornless stems, twining up to 3 m. Leaves are lance shaped, flat with distinct midrib, dark green 5–15 mm long. Occur in groups of three. Flowers are small, white or pinkish white, solitary or in 2–3 per axil on short stalks. Fruits, fleshy, globular are up to 5–7 mm in diameter. Fruits ripen from green to orange-red, containing 1 black seed. Roots are fibrous with short rhizomes, often with narrow tubers; stems arise from a small central crown.

## Basket asparagus fern

Basket asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus* cv. *Sprengeri*) is one of the most significant garden escapees invading the coastline. It survives well on sand dunes, shallow-soiled headlands and in rainforest understory. In some places it has become the dominant ground cover displacing native plants, even in undisturbed systems. Introduced from Africa, it is a problem along the entire coast and is also known as ground asparagus or asparagus fern. It has been recognised in Australia as a Weed of National Significance.

### Description

Basket asparagus has long, arching, prickly stems up to 2 m long. The slender leaves are light green. It produces clusters of small, cream-coloured flowers (normally August to September) and fruits (normally September to October) up to 8 mm in diameter. Fruits ripen to

bright red and each contains a single, black, round seed. Tubers bearing starch and water are present, but these do not regrow or reproduce. It is spread by fruit-eating birds.

## Climbing asparagus fern

Climbing asparagus fern (*Asparagus africanus*) is another example of a garden plant wreaking havoc in the bush. As its name suggests, climbing asparagus fern is an accomplished climber and easily scrambles over other vegetation up to 12 m into the canopy. Naturalised in several coastal regions, climbing asparagus fern has the potential to smother trees and damage rainforests, vine scrubs and riparian vegetation.

### Description

Climbing asparagus fern has narrow leaves and prickly stems that help it to clamber up and hang over other plants or supporting structure. Clusters of small, white flowers in spring are followed by green ripening to orange berries that are eaten and dispersed by birds. In the absence of a host on which to climb, this weed can grow as a scrambling, low shrub.

## Feathered asparagus fern

Feathered asparagus fern (*Asparagus plumosus*) is a fast-growing climber native to South Africa. Feathered asparagus fern is a garden plant that causes serious environmental problems when it escapes into bushland. Feathered asparagus fern, like climbing asparagus fern is an accomplished climber and easily scrambles over other vegetation up into the canopy.

### Description

Feathered asparagus fern can climb up to 5 m high. It has very fine leaves, thorny long stems and strong underground rhizomes. The flowers are greenish-white, bell shaped and 5–7 mm wide. Berries are green ripening to black and 4–5 mm wide. The roots appear swollen and thick and do not produce tubers. Feathered asparagus fern is very similar in appearance and impact to basket asparagus fern except feathered asparagus fern has black berries while basket asparagus fern has orange berries. Feathered asparagus fern prefers temperate to sub tropical areas. It flowers in spring to autumn and berries are produced during this time. Each berry contains one seed. Feathered asparagus fern is spread by birds and garden dumping.

## Control

### Managing asparagus ferns

The GBO requires a person to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks posed by asparagus ferns. This fact sheet provides information and some options for controlling asparagus ferns.

## Prevention and early detection

Problems with existing plants may be contained if birds are prevented from accessing the berries. Be sure to avoid the irresponsible practice of dumping excess plants, berries or plant pieces in bushland. Unwanted plants should be disposed of at your local waste facility.

## Physical control

Prevent birds from accessing berries. Dig out roots and dispose of them at your local waste facility.

Remove the entire crown and underground stem to prevent regrowth. This requires digging underneath the central growing point and lifting it out of the ground. Any regrowth that occurs can be kept under control by regular mowing or digging out.

## Herbicide control

There are no herbicides specifically registered for the control of asparagus ferns in Queensland. However, a permit allows people generally to use some herbicide products to control asparagus ferns as an environmental weed in various situations.

See Table 1 for the treatment options in situations allowed by the permit.

Prior to using the herbicides listed under this permit (PER11463) you must read or have read to you and understand the conditions of the permit. To obtain a copy of this permit visit [apvma.gov.au](http://apvma.gov.au).

Foliar application or the overall spray method is useful for dense monocultures of plants where there is no risk of damaging native vegetation. A small spray bottle can be used for areas around native vegetation to avoid off target drift.

The basal bark application method involves spraying or painting a herbicide and diesel mix to the lower sections of the stems for 15–30 cm from where it comes out from the crown. Apply to the whole circumference of each stem.

## Native asparagus fern

Native asparagus (*Asparagus racemosus*) is the only native asparagus fern. It occurs in north Queensland and extends down to just south of Brisbane. It is a vine or small shrub that could be easily mistaken for climbing asparagus or feathered asparagus. The key difference is that the native species has longer leaflets that grow to 3 cm long.

## More information

More information is available from your local government office or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).

**Table 1. Herbicides for the control of asparagus ferns**

Situation	Herbicide	Rate	Registration details	Comments
Non-agricultural areas, domestic and public service areas, commercial and industrial areas, bushland/ native forests, roadsides, rights-of-way, vacant lots, wastelands, wetlands, dunal and coastal areas	Dicamba 500 g/L (e.g. Kamba 500 <sup>®</sup> )	200 mL on mature per 100 L water, up to 1 L on regrowth	APVMA permit PER11463 (permit expires 30/04/2027)	<b>Ground asparagus fern</b> Spot spray only for short-term knockdown
	Fluroxypyr 200 g/L (e.g. FMC Fluroxypyr 200 Herbicide <sup>®</sup> )	35 mL per 1 L diesel/ kerosene		<b>Climbing and feathered asparagus ferns</b> Basal bark spray
	Metsulfuron-methyl 600 g/L (e.g. Associate <sup>®</sup> , Ken-Met 600 <sup>®</sup> )	10 g per 100 L water plus wetting agent or 100 g/ha plus wetting agent		<b>Ground asparagus fern and bridal creeper</b> Spot spray Do not use on coastal dunes or near the root zone of casuarinas or pandanus trees
	Diesel	Apply neat		<b>All pest asparagus species</b> Paint or spot spray crowns Herbicide control trials suggest cutting all stems near ground level and spraying the entire central crown of the plant with undiluted diesel, to the point of runoff gives good control Careful application will ensure minimal risk to adjacent non-target plants

**Read the label carefully before use and always use the herbicide in accordance with the directions on the label.**



Bridal creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*)



Climbing asparagus fern thorns



Basket or ground asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus* cv. *Sprengeri*)



Climbing asparagus fern growth tip



Climbing asparagus fern (*Asparagus africanus*)



Climbing asparagus fern plant form



Feathered asparagus fern (*Asparagus plumosus*)  
(Photo courtesy Sheldon Navie)

Fact sheets are available from [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au). The control methods recommended should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation, and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the use of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, the department does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

