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PERESKIA

Pereskia aculeata

Family: Cactus (*Cactaceae*)

Barbados gooseberry

Afrikaans: Barbadosstekelbessie

isiZulu: uqwaningi

Description:

- ❖ An erect woody shrub when young, becoming scrambling or climbing and vine-like, with branches up to 33 ft (10 m) long that may shroud a large tree
- ❖ Spines on the trunk are long, slender and in groups; those on the branches are short and usually in pairs
- ❖ The deciduous, alternate, short-petioled, waxy leaves are elliptic, oblong or ovate, with a short point at the apex, sometimes fleshy
- ❖ To some people, the flowers are lemon-scented; others say sweet and pungent in odour; still others, of unpleasant or repulsive odour
- ❖ They are white, yellowish or pink-tinted
- ❖ The fruit is round, with thin, smooth, somewhat leathery skin.

Origin:

- ❖ Believed to be indigenous to the West Indies, coastal northern South America and Panama

Reason for Introduction:

- ❖ Ornamental
- ❖ Security hedging

Where found / Problems caused:

- ❖ *Pereskia* is a problem throughout coastal KwaZulu-Natal and Zululand
- ❖ Seeds are spread by birds and animals
- ❖ Has established itself in the wild
- ❖ It can form an impenetrable hedge
- ❖ Readily invades plantations, forest margins and gaps
- ❖ Does extensive damage to forest areas by smothering indigenous trees
- ❖ One specimen that had infested a tree had its stems cut at the base, but after four years the 'dry' stems of the *Pereskia* that fell from the tree, set root and re-grew¹

Did you know?:

- ❖ Planted over graves as protection against vandalism by the Zulu nation
- ❖ There is a variegated variety that is also invasive
- ❖ *Bougainvillea* is often mistaken for *Pereskia*, but the leaves of *Pereskia* are fleshier and the thorns have a buffalo horn protuberance at the base

Control:

- ❖ Extremely difficult to kill and eradicate
- ❖ Continuous follow-up is essential
- ❖ Wearing strong protective gloves, cut into the foliage at head height allowing access to the stems
- ❖ Remove all cut material
- ❖ Some believe the aerial parts will die, but others refute this
- ❖ Dig out stems and roots and burn all cut material on site
- ❖ Single stems and roots can re-grow
- ❖ Monitor regularly
- ❖ The destroyed habitat will need rehabilitation
- ❖ Can be controlled by Triclopyr or biological control with the leaf-feeding flea-beetle, *Phenrica guérini*
- ❖ This flea-beetle has caused significant damage to *Pereskia* plants at Port Alfred, Eastern Cape
- ❖ However, although the beetle was also released widely in KwaZulu-Natal, it has not become established here



Additional General Information:

- ❖ In the battle against IAPs the layman has an “arsenal” of herbicides to choose from and is often unaware of the possible damage to the environment and the potential consequences of the indiscriminate and unskilled use of these chemicals
- ❖ All herbicides have to be registered before being sold in South Africa and their use is controlled by law
- ❖ It is vitally important to read the instructions on the label of the herbicide container before use
- ❖ Herbicides do not fall under the “poison category” but because of the “toxicity” hazard to people and the environment, safety precautions must be observed and protective clothing worn

Acknowledgements:

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- ❖ The Mtunzini Conservancy for the idea
- ❖ Invasive Alien Plants in KwaZulu-Natal Management and Control: A Wildlife Handbook, produced by WESSA-KZN
- ❖ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pereskia_aculeata
- ❖ <http://www.weeds.gov.au/publications/guidelines/alert/p-aculeata.html>
- ❖ http://www.hear.org/pier/species/pereskia_aculeata.htm

It is hoped that this series will create awareness in respect of Invasive Alien Plants and guide and advise us in terms of what is required to control and manage IAPs

Should you have any questions or require further clarity, please contact:

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