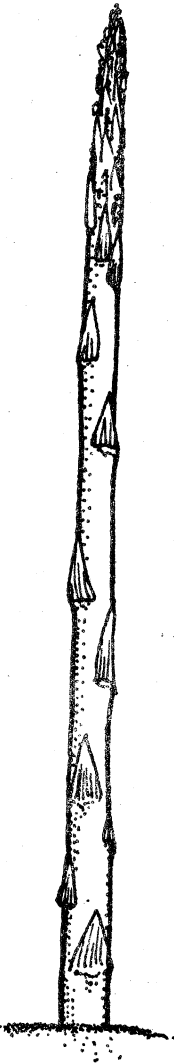


ASPARAGUS

A.E. Esler

To most people asparagus means the edible spears of a European vegetable plant. When left to mature these shoots grow into stiff tough stalks with needle-like leaves. These are not true leaves but slender stems behaving as leaves and known as cladodes. The true leaves are the triangular scales which lie against the stem.



Beside vegetable asparagus (Asparagus officinalis), there are four species with sprawling or twining stems grown in gardens for ornament. All reproduce by seeds attractive to birds, so it is not unusual to find seedlings some distance from parent plants. Climbing plants such as these have a major advantage because they can use other plants to support them thus reaching the light with little effort wasted on developing supportive stems.

The root-stocks are well anchored to the ground and cannot be pulled out without breaking the stem. To add to difficulty of control, the weedy Asparagus species intertwine with other plants and cannot be sprayed selectively with herbicide.

Asparagus asparagoides, the smilax of florists, has probably been in New Zealand for more than a century but did not attract notice as a weed until the 1950s. Although occurring in the wild state from Christchurch northwards, smilax is plentiful only in the northern half of the North Island. It is most conspicuous in hedges and on coastal slopes.

Asparagus scandens has only recently been recorded as a weed and already has a strong hold in many forest remnants in the warmer parts of New Zealand. Unlike other naturalised species of Asparagus, it has stems which bind the supporting plants closely causing ring barking as the support expands in diameter.

Asparagus setaceus, known also as A. plumosus or asparagus fern, is beginning to spread from gardens but is not yet a weed of any importance.

Asparagus densiflorus, better known by the superseded name of A. sprengeri, has now spread from Auckland gardens and is becoming well established in hedges.

The Asparagus species are just one set ^{of} aggressive garden escapes beginning to impress themselves on the landscape. There are no known ways of controlling large infestations so be aware of their threat and dig out asparagus plants where they are serving no useful purpose before they become fully established.

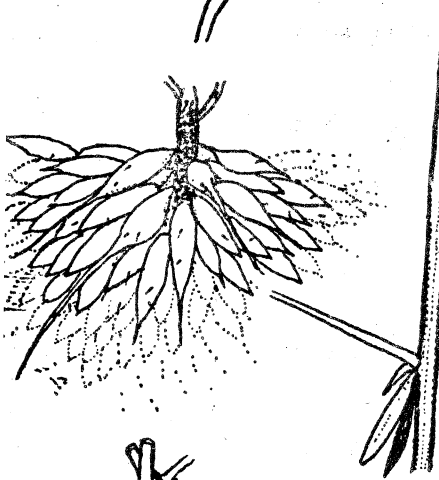
The four weedy Asparagus species are natives of southern Africa where they inhabit open country with supporting vegetation, and forest.

Asparagus

Asparagus asparagoides



Asparagus densiflorus



Asparagus scandens



Asparagus setaceus

