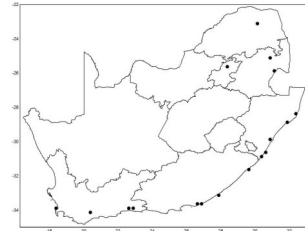
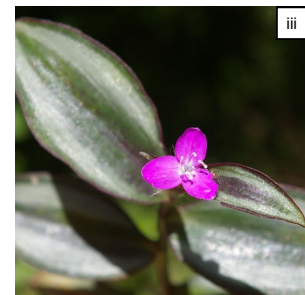
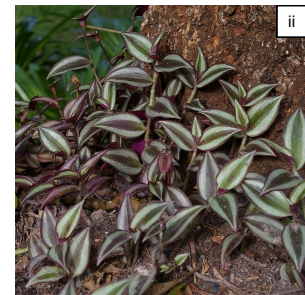


ARC-PPRI FACT SHEETS ON INVASIVE ALIEN PLANTS  
AND THEIR CONTROL IN SOUTH AFRICA

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**WANDERING JEW** (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) is a perennial, evergreen, and succulent groundcover with rooted stems that reaches about 50 cm high. The leaves, which clasp the stems, are shiny and oval, and about 10 x 3 cm in size. They may be dark green and purplish below, or they may be variegated with creamy white longitudinal stripes. Small white flowers with 3 petals are borne intermittently in summer in clusters at the ends of stems (i). These are followed by small fruit capsules. This white-flowered variety is native to South America, and was imported into South Africa as a garden ornamental. Purple wandering Jew (*Tradescantia zebrina*) is very similar, but has bluey-green leaves with 2 silver bands above and purple below (ii). Purple wandering Jew has pink to violet flowers (iii), and is native to North America. Both species (plus creeping inch plant, *Callisia repens*, which is similar to the white-flowered wandering Jew) are declared invaders in South Africa and must be controlled, or eradicated where possible.



#### THE PROBLEM

All three species mentioned above have escaped cultivation in South Africa and are invading disturbed forests and streambanks, as well as other areas that are moist and shaded. Owing to the fact that the stems, and even parts thereof, can root, these plants have the potential to form thick mats of vegetation that outcompete indigenous plants and transform local habitats. Wandering Jew is spread chiefly by gardeners who share cuttings with other gardeners, and/or dispose of them in garden refuse where they re-root and grow. However, where infestations grow near water, stem fragments may be carried downstream where they have the potential to take root and begin new infestations. In agricultural areas, stem fragments may be spread by farm machinery, or be transported in the hooves of livestock.

#### THE SOLUTION

Infestations may be controlled by hand-pulling, or even by rolling the mat of vegetation up like a carpet. However, since each fragment of stem has the potential to grow, care must be taken to ensure that all stem fragments are removed from the soil. Furthermore, the sap from the leaves of purple wandering Jew may irritate the skin, so gloves should be worn before touching the plants. Although no herbicides have been registered specifically for use on wandering Jew, triclopyr may be used, provided there is regular follow up. As with most invasive alien plants, biological control is the only long-term, sustainable solution. Unfortunately, no potential biocontrol agents have been identified for use. In the meantime, gardeners and landowners are strongly urged to eradicate these plants, and replace them with indigenous species such as *Plectranthus saccatus*, stoep jacaranda (iv), which grows in similar situations. But other indigenous ideas are available here: <http://pza.sanbi.org/>.



#### environmental affairs

Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA