

Invasive Plant Information Note

What is it?

Montbretia (*Crocsmia X crocosmiflora*) is an invasive perennial plant that grows from underground corms. It is a horticultural hybrid which was developed in France for ornamental purposes in the 1880s. Since then, it has escaped into the wild and spread rapidly across Europe during the latter part of the 20th Century. It has naturalised in many parts of Ireland, especially in the west and south-west due to the mild and damp conditions. Montbretia can invade most low-growing habitats such as wet grasslands, gardens, hedgerows, pastures, waste areas and roadsides (See Fig. 2 & Fig. 3). Please see link to its distribution across Ireland: <http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/#/Home>.



Fig. 1: Montbretia (www.wildflowerfinder.org.uk)



Fig. 2: Invading a garden (www.nonnativespecies.org)

Why should we be worried about it?

The biodiversity of ecosystems can be significantly affected by an infestation of Montbretia. Once established, it out-competes the local flora and forms large dense stands (See Fig. 1 & Fig. 4). Montbretia displaces native vegetation by smothering ground cover plants and small shrubs. It inhibits the establishment of indigenous seedlings. Montbretia tolerates frost, heat, moderate shade and grazing so is capable of colonising a variety of habitats. It consumes fertiliser and water intended for crops. Small fragments of roots can easily separate from the parent plant and become established in the wild.



Fig. 3: Roadside infestation
(www.geograph.ie)



Fig. 4: Dense early growth
(www.plant-lore.com)



Fig. 5: Trumpet-shaped flower heads
(www.wr-en.co.uk)

How do we recognise Montbretia?

Growth begins in early spring with leaves sprouting vigorously in March (See Fig. 4). The grass-like leaves are bright green, flat, sword-shaped and may be slightly pleated at the base. The leaves are soft, hairless and have pointed tips (See Fig. 6). They are 30-80cm long, 1-2cm wide and are mostly clustered near the base of the plant. Flowering takes place between July and September. Montbretia is easily recognised when in flower by the distinct shape and colour of its flower heads. The trumpet-shaped flowers are usually orange-red with yellow centres on zig-zag spikes (See Fig. 5). The petals are 3-4cm long and 2-5cm wide. The flowers form in two rows along each stem (See Fig. 6). The fruit are capsules that turn from green to brown and become shrivelled as they mature (See Fig. 7). Dead brown leaves, dead flowering stems and seed heads are present throughout winter. Please note that in milder areas the leaves may not die back completely in winter.



Fig. 6: Montbretia leaf and flower stem
(www.nonnativespecies.org)



Fig. 7: Fruit capsules
(www.nonnativespecies.org)



Fig. 8: Montbretia corm - 2.5cm wide
(www.nonnativespecies.org)

How does Montbretia spread?

Montbretia's primary mode of spreading is vegetatively, through underground corms and rhizome fragments. The corm is a bulb-like organ that provides the plant with energy (See Fig. 8). Each plant can produce up to 14 new corms annually. These corms break off from the parent plant and begin to produce their own root network. This increases the size and density of an infestation. The corms, corm fragments and rhizomes can be spread unintentionally as a result of ground disturbance, dumping of garden waste and by attaching to machinery.

How to manage Montbretia

Complete eradication of Montbretia from a site may take a number of years. Non-chemical treatment, chemical treatment or a combination of both can be employed to remove the species. As Montbretia is capable of regeneration from corms and small fragments of rhizome, all material must be handled and disposed of in a way which does not result in the potential for further spread. Small pieces of plant material may be spread unintentionally on shoes, clothes and agricultural equipment. The most effective time to remove Montbretia is just before full flowering occurs in summer. Please note that control will require continued input and follow-up over a number of years to deal with any re-growth by corms or rhizomes.

For Further Information on Invasive Alien Species please visit:

- Invasive Species Ireland <http://invasivespeciesireland.com/>
- European Commission http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/index_en.htm