

Old man's beard

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Clematis vitalba*

AKA: Traveller's joy, evergreen clematis

Native to: Southern England and continental Europe

Habitat: Forest margins, hedgerows and disturbed ground

Clematis vitalba is a deciduous, woody climber. Stems can grow to over 10m and reach a diameter of 15 – 20cm. Mature stems have grey, stringy bark, with thickened nodes which are approximately 15cm apart. New stems are deeply ridged, dark purple and green, with silky white hairs near the apex, and have been recorded to grow as much as 3 m per year. Where stems grow along the ground they can form new roots at the nodes.

Leaves grow in an opposite arrangement and have 3 – 5 (usually 5) leaflets with long petioles. Leaflets are variable in size and shape; ovate, acute to acuminate, rounded or sub-cordate at the base, and coarsely toothed. The leaves have both a light and a shade form.

White round flowers occur in clusters with various stamens which are clearly visible. They are 2cm in width and have 4 sepals (commonly mistaken for petals). The fruit, which are seed clusters (achene), have a white – grey feather appearance in autumn through winter.

C. vitalba is a fast growing vine that can climb 25m tall trees, this added weight can eventually cause supporting vegetable to collapse. Low growing infestations can prevent access by creating an impenetrable barrier of vegetation. These dense thickets reduce biodiversity by out-competing native plants.



Key ID Features

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Flowers in
clusters

Stamens

4 sepals

2cm

Commonly found
scrambling over
hedgerows

Out-competes
native plants

Can form dense
impenetrable
thickets

Pinnately
compound

3 – 5 leaflets.
3 - 10 cm long

Long
petioles

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Identification throughout the year

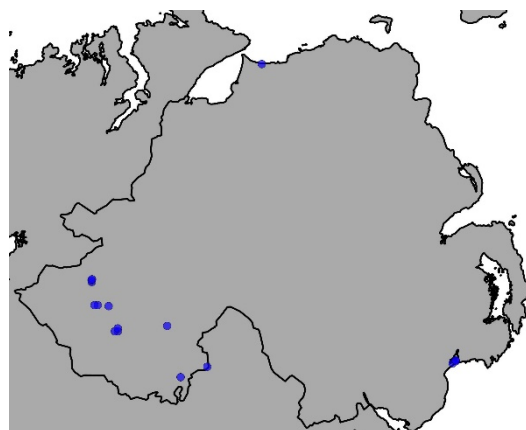
During the autumn - winter the feathery seed heads (achenes) appear wispy and white, from which this plant derives its other name 'Old man's beard'.



Malcolm Morley. Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=493638>

Distribution

Few reported records in Northern Ireland



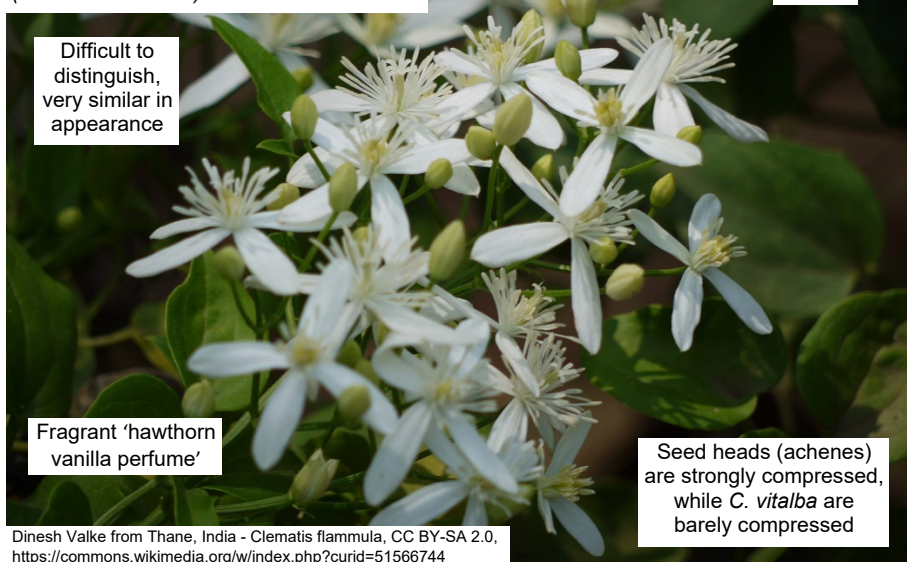
Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland - available
<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/search/?q=Clematis+vitalba>
 Check website for current distribution

Similar Species

C. vitalba can be distinguished from other species of *clematis* by the flower colour, structure and the climbing habit.

Sweet-scented virgin's bower

Non-native
 (*Clematis flammula*)



Difficult to distinguish, very similar in appearance

Fragrant 'hawthorn vanilla perfume'

Smaller leaves

Seed heads (achenes) are strongly compressed, while *C. vitalba* are barely compressed

Dinesh Valke from Thane, India - *Clematis flammula*, CC BY-SA 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=51566744>

Common Ivy

Native
 (*Hedera helix*)



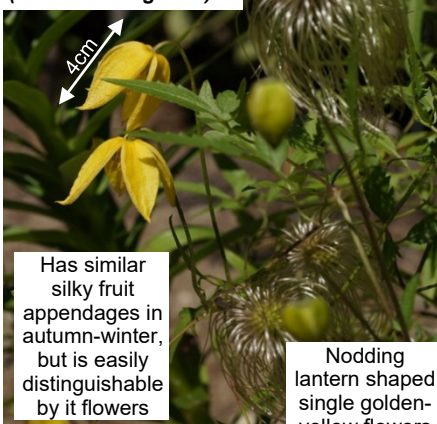
May be mistaken as usually occurs in the same habitat

Does not have blooms of white flowers

Row17, CC BY-SA 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13450288>

Golden clematis

Non-native
 (*Clematis tangutica*)

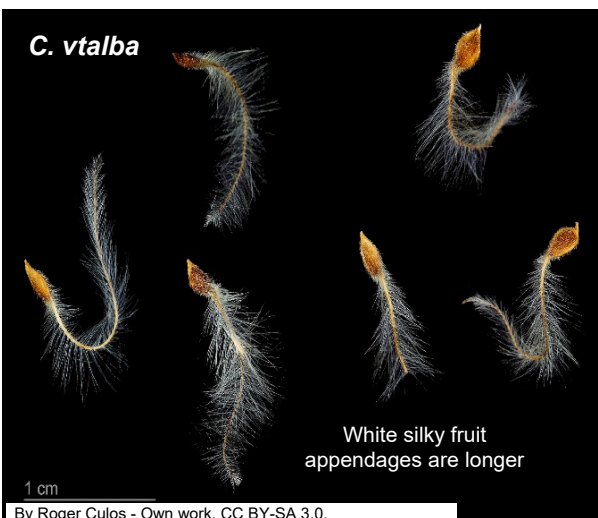


Has similar silky fruit appendages in autumn-winter, but is easily distinguishable by its flowers

Nodding lantern shaped single golden-yellow flowers

Xavierserralm, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=35688874>

C. vitalba

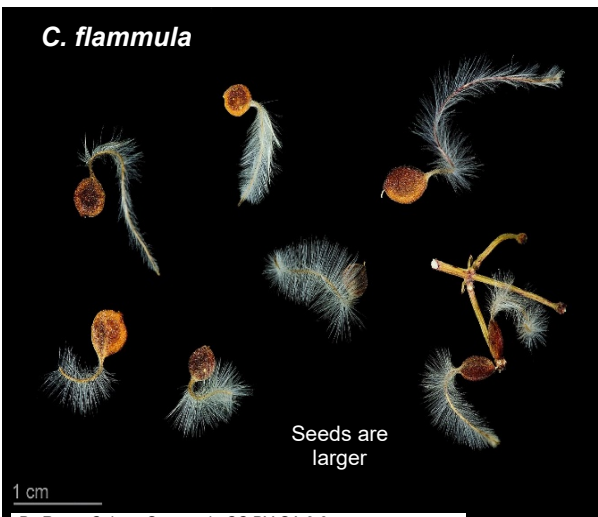


White silky fruit appendages are longer

1 cm

By Roger Culos - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32051693>

C. flammula



Seeds are larger

1 cm

By Roger Culos - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32051567>

References and further reading:

CABI *Clematis vitalba* (Traveller's joy) datasheet - available at
<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/14280>

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.