

Hottentot-Fig

(*Carpobrotus edulis*)



Family name: Aizoaceae (Fig-Marigold family)

Common name/s: Hottentot-Fig, Ice Plant, Highway Ice Plant, Pigface



Hottentot-Fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*) is a succulent, perennial plant known for its mat-forming growth and bright flowers. In Ireland, it is considered an invasive species, especially in coastal areas, where it can outcompete native vegetation and alter ecosystem dynamics. The plant spreads through both seeds and vegetative fragments, making control challenging.

Management strategies include mechanical removal, herbicide application, and preventing the planting or disposal of the plant in natural areas. If left unmanaged, Hottentot-Fig can significantly impact coastal biodiversity and habitat structure.

Description - Hottentot-Fig is noted for its spreading, mat-forming growth and bright, daisy-like flowers. It has been introduced to many coastal regions worldwide, including Ireland, where it is often used for erosion control and as a groundcover in gardens.

However, it can become invasive, displacing native vegetation and altering coastal ecosystems. The plant's ability to thrive in nutrient-poor soils and its vigorous growth make it a significant threat to coastal habitats.

Key characteristics include:



Height: Typically grows to a height of 10-30 cm, forming dense mats that can cover large areas.

Leaves: The leaves are thick, fleshy, and triangular in cross-section, measuring 6-10 cm in length. They are green to yellowish-green, with a smooth surface and pointed tips.

The succulent nature of the leaves allows the plant to store water, enabling it to survive in dry conditions.

Flowers: Produces large, daisy-like flowers that are yellow when young, turning pink or purplish as they age. The flowers are 5-10 cm in diameter and appear mainly in spring and summer, although they can bloom sporadically throughout the year.



Fruit: Forms fleshy, fig-like fruits that are yellowish-green when ripe and edible.



The fruits contain numerous small seeds, which can be dispersed by animals and water.



Stem: The stems are succulent and creeping, capable of rooting at the nodes to form new plants.

Stems can grow several metres in length, allowing the plant to spread rapidly.

Root: Roots are robust, can regenerate from fragments and tolerant of drought.

Roots are fibrous and extend widely, creating a dense mat that anchors the plant securely in sandy or rocky soils.



Habitat - Hottentot-Fig is native to South Africa, where it grows in coastal areas and sandy soils.

In its introduced range, it thrives in:

- **Coastal Cliffs and Sand Dunes:** Commonly found along coastal cliffs, sand dunes, and beaches, where it can stabilise sandy soils but also outcompete native dune vegetation.
- **Roadsides and Disturbed Areas:** Can establish in disturbed soils, such as roadsides, railway embankments, and gardens.
- **Rocky and Sandy Habitats:** Prefers rocky outcrops and sandy soils, where it can tolerate dry, nutrient-poor conditions.

The plant grows best in full sun and can tolerate a wide range of soil types, including sandy, rocky, and well-drained soils.

Hottentot-Fig is also highly tolerant of saline conditions, making it well-suited to coastal environments.

Status in Ireland - In Ireland, Hottentot-Fig is considered an invasive species, particularly along coastal areas where it can outcompete native dune and cliff vegetation.

Its dense growth can displace native species, reducing biodiversity and altering the structure of coastal ecosystems.

Reproduction and Spread - Hottentot-Fig spreads through both seed production and vegetative propagation:

- **Seed Dispersal:** The seeds can be dispersed by animals that eat the fleshy fruits or by water currents in coastal areas.
- **Vegetative Propagation:** The plant primarily spreads through creeping stems, which can root at the nodes to form new plants.

Even small fragments can regenerate and establish new colonies, making it highly invasive.

Management and Control - Controlling Hottentot-Fig is challenging due to its ability to regenerate from fragments and its extensive root system.

Effective management often requires a combination of methods:

- **Mechanical Control:** Hand-pulling or digging out plants is effective for small infestations, but care must be taken to remove all plant material, as fragments left behind can regrow.

Cutting and covering the area with a tarp to block sunlight may also help control the spread.

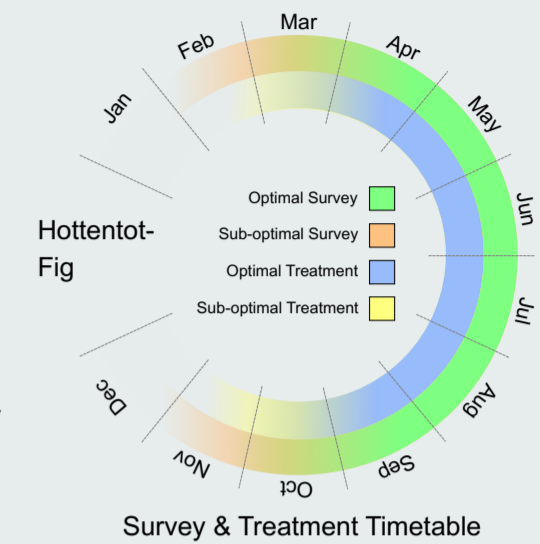
- **Chemical Control:** Herbicides may be applied to manage larger infestations, particularly where mechanical control is not feasible.

Multiple treatments may be needed for effective control.

- **Preventative Measures:** Avoid planting Hottentot-Fig in natural or semi-natural coastal areas, and ensure that garden waste is disposed of properly to prevent accidental spread.

Ecological Impact - Hottentot-Fig can have significant ecological impacts, particularly in coastal habitats:

- **Competition with Native Species:** Forms dense mats that outcompete native dune and cliff vegetation, leading to reduced biodiversity.
- **Alteration of Habitat Structure:** Its growth can change the physical structure of coastal habitats, affecting species that rely on open sandy areas or native plants.
- **Soil Modification:** The plant can alter soil chemistry and composition, potentially making conditions less favourable for native species.



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