



June's Weed of the Month: Mile-A-Minute Vine

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The first successful population of Mile a Minute Vine (*Polygonum perfoliatum* L) was noted in the 1930s at a nursery site in York, Pennsylvania. It is speculated that the seed was spread with Rhododendron stock which originated from Asia and is native to India and the far east. Mile a Minute Vine, a member of the Buckwheat family, is also known as Devil's tail tearthumb or the "Kudzu of the north." This annual plant reproduces profusely by producing lots of small blue berries containing seeds that are dispersed by birds and small mammals.

Description: A spiny summer annual vine growing to 7m in length. Mile-a-Minute vine is easily recognized by its small perfectly triangular leaves and the cup-like, leafy structure (ocrea) from which the leaves and small white flowers emerge. It can climb over shrubs, small trees, and structures, forming dense mats. The mature Mile-a-minute vine has stems that are branched, green vines, red-brown toward the base, with reflexed prickles (1-2mm long). Petioles have recurved spines and are slightly longer than the blade. Flowers are formed as early as June, but typically from late July through August, at the end of branches. Individual flowers are inconspicuous and greenish white to yellow (3-5mm long).



Photo from Plant Conservation Alliance Alien Fact Sheet

Reproduction: Mile-a-minute weed is primarily a self-pollinating plant due to its inconspicuous, closed flowers and lack of a detectable scent, with rare out crossing.



Photo courtesy New England Invasive Plant Atlas

Fruits and viable seeds are produced without support from pollinators. Vegetative propagation from roots has not been successful for this plant. It is a very tender annual, withering with a slight frost, and reproduces successfully until the first frost. Mile-a-minute is a productive seeder, producing scores of seeds on a single plant over a lengthy season, from June until October in Virginia, and a slightly shorter season in more northern geographic areas. Birds are most likely the principal long-distance dispersal agents of mile-a-minute vine. Transport of seeds short distances by native ant species has been observed. Mile-a-minute

vine seeds can be buoyant for 7-9 days, thus making water an important mode of dispersal.

Habitat/distribution: Mile-a-minute is a weed of landscapes, nursery crops, Christmas tree plantations and orchards, as well as clear-cut timberlands, roadsides, drainage ditches, wetlands and rights-of-way. It thrives on moist, well-drained soils and full sunlight, but can tolerate low light conditions for part of the day. The ability of mile-a-minute to attach to other plants with its recurved barbs and climb over the plants to reach an area of high light intensity is a key to its survival. Essentially, it can kill other plants by its rapid growth, which results in smothering the supporting plant and reduction in photosynthesis. Mile-a-minute weed is currently found in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Washington, D.C and Virginia. These states and the District of Columbia comprise about 20 percent of the estimated possible range for this species. It is more prevalent in New York State in recent years.



Photo courtesy New England Invasive Plant Atlas

Control methods: Manual and chemical methods are effective for controlling mile-a-minute. Seedlings and vines are easy to pull by hand as long as gloves and sturdy clothing are worn. However, pulling vines with mature fruits should be avoided as it may help spread seeds. Contact and systemic herbicides are both effective in controlling it. Because the foliage has a waxy covering, the herbicide must be mixed with surfactant to help it adhere to the plant. Glyphosate can be applied successfully for control, as well as triclopyr. Both of these herbicides will injure susceptible broadleaf plants the vine may be attached to, so caution must be taken when making an application. Spot treatments are most likely to be effective and will minimize injury to other native or ornamental species.

References:

Weeds of the Northeast, R. Uva, J. Neal and J. DiTomaso. Cornell University Press.

<http://massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/mileaminute.html> (Massachusetts Introduced Outreach Pest Project website)

Plant Conservation Alliance Alien Plants Fact Sheet at:
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pope1.htm>