



EXOTIC INVASIVE SPECIES, US VIRGIN ISLANDS

Rubber Vine (*Cryptostegia grandiflora*)

Milkweed Family (Asclepiadaceae) Native Range Madagascar

Vines

Vines are plants with a climbing growth habit. They rely on trees or other objects for structural support and can often grow quickly. Most vines produce their own food and are not true parasites, although they can harm other plants. The vines featured here grow so aggressively that they smother other plants by blocking out sunlight and killing them.

Description

Rubber vine has bell shaped, showy purple flowers that are usually produced after heavy rains. It climbs with whip-like shoots that can reach 120 feet tall when supported by a tree, or a six foot clump unsupported in an open field. The leaves are smooth, glossy and thick. Leaves, vines and seed pods exude a toxic white sap when broken. Rigid horn-like seed pods form in pairs and contain 300 to 400 small brown seeds. It is toxic to livestock and is known to kill cattle in Australia and reduce the quality of pastures.



(Rubber Vine Flower)

Historical Introduction

Rubber vine has been introduced around the tropical world primarily by gardeners and plant collectors fascinated by its attractive purple blooms. Internet seed companies still sell this plant online and usually only give a passing mention to the aggressive spread and the ecological and economic harm it can cause. In the Virgin Islands it is still occasionally planted by landscapers unfamiliar with

its aggressive, invasive behavior. Landscape planting may appear harmless or even attractive, they the are also the seed source for a plant invasion harming the local ecology.



(Rubber Vine Mat Over Tree Canopy)

Ecological Threat

Rubber vine climbs and smothers plants, killing native vegetation and blanketing areas so other plants cannot grow. The Global Invasive Species Database designated it among "100 of the World's Worst Invasive Alien Species". In Australia, rubber vine has become one of the most invasive plants. There is a nationwide weed management plan that costs millions each year to control it and costs tens of millions more in lost productivity of agricultural land.

Preferred Habitat

Rubber vine prefers rainfall levels between 400 and 1400 mm/yr, which includes most of the Virgin Islands. It thrives in agricultural areas, pastures, riparian zones, forests and wetlands. Roadsides, fence lines, dry forests and disturbed areas are also readily colonized.

Dispersal

The climbing vine produces pairs of seed capsules containing hundreds of wind-borne seeds. The pods themselves can float in fresh or salt water for months with viable seeds intact. In St. Croix, a large patch near the Buccaneer Hotel is spreading via floodwater throughout a roadside wetland.

Management Options

Virgin Islanders can help by first removing rubber vine from around their homes. There are four methods of controlling or removing rubber vine; biological controls (introducing a rust disease), herbicides, fire, and mechanical. In the Virgin Islands, physically chopping and pulling out individual plants or clumps is recommended. Do not remove clumps of the vines and discard them directly into the bush, as the vine can root itself and spread. Instead, let the chopped vegetation sit in the direct sun for several days or dry out or burn it on site. Consider planting native species or purple sandpaper vine instead of rubber vine in landscapes.

Additional Information

Invasive Species Specialist Group:
www.issg.org

<http://www.weeds.gov.au/publications/guidelines/wons/pubs/c-grandiflora.pdf>

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EXOTIC INVASIVE SPECIES, US VIRGIN ISLANDS

Coral Vine (*Antigonon leptopus*)

Buckwheat Family (Polygonaceae) Native Range Mexico

Vines

Description

Coral vine is a fast growing, climbing vine from Mexico capable of quickly reaching 40 feet tall in the Virgin Islands. It attaches to trees, fences, utility poles or other supportive structures using its coiled tendrils. The leaves are heart shaped and it is known for its large, showy clusters of bright pink flowers (sometimes white). Fruit are small, dry and inconspicuous containing many black seeds.



(Coral Vine Flowers and Leaves)

Historical Introduction

Coral vine is widely cultivated as a landscape plant in the southern United States and throughout the tropics because of its showy pink flowers, fast growth and ability to cover fences and walls. It has been found in the Virgin Islands since before 1960, but in recent years it has spread aggressively in the wild; growing in dense carpets.

Ecological Threat

Coral vine grows aggressively, climbing and forming dense blankets that can smother the plants on which it grows. It is considered a Class II Invasive Exotic by the Florida Invasive Plant Council. The plant is not a true parasite because it does not take nutrients from a host, but it can kill by smothering.

Preferred Habitat

Coral vine prefers full sun but can also tolerate some shade. In the Virgin Islands, moist habitats are more susceptible to invasion. It tolerates poor soil and periods of drought.

Dispersal

One of the challenges in controlling coral vine is that seeds are produced prolifically and are dispersed in a variety of ways. Fruit are eaten and spread by wildlife or can float on water and travel downstream. Underground tuberous roots will vigorously re-sprout new shoots and leaves when the plant is cut.

Management Options

Coral vine is extremely difficult to remove. For home-owners cleaning small areas, the best option is mechanical removal, but will require vigilant cutting and re-cutting of new sprouts. Plants will likely continue to re-sprout until the underground tubers are removed. There is no proven effective method for removing it from large areas in the Virgin Islands.

Additional Information

<http://www.invasivespecies.gov/>
<http://www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/>
<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/40>

Dodder Vine—A native vine that is a weed, but not an invasive plant

The dodder vine (*Cuscuta americana*), with its distinct orange tendrils, is not an exotic invasive plant. It is native to the Virgin Islands, although many would rather never see it again.

This plant is a true parasite and pierces the tissue of a host plant with small suckers and pulls nutrients from it. It does not produce its own food from photosynthesis and adult dodder vines do not have roots. Scientists recently discovered dodder can “smell” the scent of healthy plants and seek them out as food like an animal. Despite all of these unwelcomed behaviors, dodder is a member of the native plant community and does not act or spread like an invasive plant. Infestations are generally seasonal and localized over smaller landscapes. Farmers and home-owners can physically remove the orange vines and pile them up to dry out and die. A widespread eradication plan for this plant is not necessary.



(Dodder Vine Covering Trees)

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