



FACT SHEET SERIES

EXOTIC INVASIVE SPECIES, US VIRGIN ISLANDS

Rubber Vine (*Cryptostegia grandiflora*)

Vines

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

Plant Family

Milkweed (Asclepiadaceae)

Native Range

Southwest Madagascar

Description

Rubber vine has bell shaped, showy purple flowers that are usually produced after heavy rains. It climbs with whip-like shoots and 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, sticky, white sap when broken. Rigid horn-like



(Rubber Vine Flower)

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 greatly reduce the quality of pastures.

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 rapid spread and the ecological and economic harm it can cause. In the Virgin Islands it is still occasionally planted by landscapers unfamiliar with the exotic plant's aggressive, invasive behavior.

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 is one of the country's most invasive plants. There is a nationwide weed management plan that costs millions each year to control it and rubber vine costs tens of millions more in lost productivity of agricultural land.



(Rubber Vine Mat Over Tree Canopy)

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-born seeds. The pods themselves can also float in fresh or salt water for months with viable seeds intact. In St. Croix, a large patch near the Buccaneer Hotel is spreading this way 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 dump clumps of chopped vines 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 to until it dries out or burn it on site. Consider planting native species or purple sandpaper vine instead of rubber vine in landscapes..

Series: Exotic Invasive Species in the US Virgin Islands

Vines	Forest Invaders
Pasture Pests	Harmful Animals

Additional Reading

Gibney, E. 2004. Native Trees & Plants of East End, St. John. Center for the Environment, USVI. 86 p.

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



FACT SHEET SERIES

EXOTIC INVASIVE SPECIES, US VIRGIN ISLANDS

Coral Vine (*Antigonon leptopus*)

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, clusters of showy bright pink (sometimes white) flowers. Fruit are small, dry and inconspicuous containing many small 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 and in old pastures; 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. Some of the largest infestations on St. Croix are the abandoned agricultural fields in La Grange.

Plant Family

Buckwheat (Polygonaceae)

Native Range Mexico

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 should never be planted in the Virgin Islands. The best control option at the local level 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. Coral vine is notoriously difficult to remove and there is no proven effective method for removing it over large areas in the Virgin Islands.

Additional Information

<http://www.invasivespecies.gov>

<http://www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/>

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** piercing the tissue of a host plant with small suckers and pulls nutrients and water 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 does. Despite these unwelcome 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)

Produced by Geographic Consulting on behalf of the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, Forestry Division. For more information contact the VIDOA at (340)-778-0997.

www.geographicconsulting.com/services/invasive-species/

