

Pueraria montana (Lour.) Merr. var. *lobata* (Willd.) Maesen and Almeida



Common Name: Kudzu vine, foot-a-night vine, vine-that-ate-the-South, Ko-hemp

Synonymy: *P. lobata* (Willd.) Ohwi. and *P. thunbergiana* (Sieb. & Zucc.) Benth.

Origin: Eastern Asia

Botanical Description: High-climbing, trailing, twining, deciduous woody vine, with tuberous roots and rope-like, dark brown stems to 20 m (65 ft) long; herbaceous stems markedly hairy. Leaves alternate, long petioled, with 3 leaflets (trifoliate); leaflets dark green, hairy on both surfaces, to 15 cm (5.4 in) long; lateral leaflets unequal at base, 1- or 2-lobed; terminal leaflet usually equal at base and 3-lobed. Flowers pea-like, reddish purple, fragrant, 2-2.5 cm (0.7-0.9 in) across, in short-stalked, elongate clusters at leaf axils, to 20 cm (7.3 in) long. Fruit a dark brown pod, flat but bulging over seeds, densely covered in long golden brown hairs, to 8 cm (3 in) long and 0.8 cm (0.3 in) wide.

Ecological Significance: Introduced in 1876 at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia as an ornamental (Bell and Wilson 1989, Shores 1997). Developed for use as a forage in Florida during the 1920s; promoted in the 1930s by the United States Soil Conservation Service for erosion control (Bell and Wilson 1989). From early 1950s, no longer advocated by the United States Department of Agriculture, and declared a weed in 1972 (Shores 1997). Forms large impenetrable masses, growing over woody vegetation and able to completely engulf unwooded areas (Godfrey 1988). Can completely envelop a tree, killing it by shutting out all light (Bell and

Wilson 1989). A serious or widespread invader of seminatural or natural habitat (Cronk and Fuller 1995). Reported from Everglades conservation areas in Broward County (Bodle 1994).

Distribution: Widely naturalized in the United States, throughout the Southeast, north to Illinois and Massachusetts and west to Texas and Oklahoma; estimated to cover 810,000 ha (2,000,000 acres) of forest land in the South (Bell and Wilson 1989). In Florida, documented as invading xeric hammocks, sandhill, scrub, hardwood hammocks, bottomland forests, strand swamps, and ruderal communities. Documented by herbarium specimens in 20 counties scattered throughout Florida as far west as Escambia to Alachua and Marion counties, Hernando on the west coast, Volusia on the east coast, and south to Lee and Miami-Dade counties. Has also been reported in natural areas from Citrus, Duval, Gadsden, Levy, Manatee, Putnam, and Wakulla counties (FLEPPC 2005). Has also invaded South Africa, Malaysia, and western Pacific Islands (Cronk and Fuller 1995).

Life History: Drought tolerant; only aboveground portions damaged by frost (Cronk and Fuller 1995). Forms new perennial root crowns from stem nodes touching the ground, with thick storage roots growing as deep as 1 m (3 ft); can take 3-10 years of repeated herbicide treatment to deplete root reserves (Moorhead and Johnson 1996). Flowers in late summer and early fall, with high production of seeds, which are dispersed by mammals and birds (Cronk and Fuller 1995).