

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Mile-a-Minute

Persicaria perfoliata



Photo: Leslie Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut,
www.invasive.org

Background:

Also known as devil's tear-thumb, mile-a-minute has been introduced into the U.S. from the Philippines several times between the late 1800s and the 1930s. It arrived in Pennsylvania in contaminated nursery stock in York.

Range:

A native of eastern Asia, this vine is not yet widespread in the U.S. but is very common in the southern two-thirds of Pennsylvania, as well as parts of WV, VA, MD, DE, NJ, NY, CT, MA, RI and NH.

Description:

This is an herbaceous, annual vine with delicate, highly branched stems that are covered by small, curved spines. The alternate leaves are triangular, light green, one to three inches wide and barbed on the underside. Round leaf-like structures called ocreae surround the stem. It is from there that the inconspicuous flowers and fruits arise. From mid-July through the first frost, green fruits appear, turning a metallic blue color as the season goes on.



Photo: Jessica Sprajcar, DCNR

Habitat:

This plant readily colonizes disturbed areas along forest edges, wetlands, stream banks and roadsides. It needs regular sunlight to thrive and prefers high soil moisture.

Biology and Spread:

Its fast growth is one way that the plant spreads, but its seeds are the primary means. Birds and other wildlife eat the fruits and spread the seeds in their droppings. Seeds are also buoyant for up to nine days in water and can be spread by streams and floods.

Ecological Threat:

Because this plant can grow up to six inches a day, it can quickly smother native vegetation and climb into the tree canopy where it restricts light availability to plants below. It can be a pest plant on tree farms and for horticultural crops where the soil is not regularly tilled.



Photo: Leslie Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut,
www.invasive.org

How to Control this Species:

Manual and Mechanical

Hand-pulling of vines is possible, especially when the soil is wet, but be sure to wear thick gloves. Removal should be done prior to fruit formation. Repeated mowing will prevent the plant from flowering and thus reduce or eliminate fruit and seed production. Monitor the site for several years to ensure no seeds germinate.

Look-a-Likes:

There are several other vines with triangular-shaped leaves that may be confused with mile-a-minute, including halbard-leaved tearthumb (*Polygonum arifolium*), climbing false buckwheat (*Polygonum scandens*), wild morning glory (*Ipomoeae pupurea*) and hedge bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*). The presence of spines and ocreae will let you know that it is indeed mile-a-minute.



Photo: Theodore Webster, USDA,
www.forestryimages.org

Chemical

A systemic herbicide like glyphosate will work on mile-a-minute, especially when used with a surfactant that will help to penetrate the leaves' waxy coating. Apply the herbicide in the summer, before fruits appear.



Rhinocominus latipes

Photo: NJ Dept. of Agriculture

Biocontrol

A weevil, *Rhinocominus latipes*, is being used on various test plots in Pennsylvania and elsewhere to control mile-a-minute. These small insects feed on the leaves and bore into the stems. While they will not completely eliminate the plant they help keep it in check and reduce fruit production.

References:

Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health:

<http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3065>

Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers:

http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/mile_a_minute.htm

University of Delaware, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Biological Control of Mile-a-Minute Weed:

<http://ag.udel.edu/enwc/research/biocontrol/mileaminute.htm>

Massachusetts Introduced Pests Outreach Project:

<http://massnrc.org/pests/mamreport.aspx>

For More Information:

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:

http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf