

Mile-a-minute

Polygonum perfoliatum

Background: Mile-a-minute, or devil's tail tearthumb, is an annual vine that prefers the disturbed areas, rights-of-ways, and streamsidings. The plant requires direct sunlight to survive, tolerating only a short period of shade during the day, and prefers a moisture rich soil. Mile-a-minute is believed to have entered the United States in the early 1900's as an accidental introduction with a shipment of rhododendron stock from Asia. I've heard tale that the nurseryman who received the plant as a stow-away found the plant interesting and established it on the outskirts of his land to see what it would do. The plant has since spread along the East Coast from Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C. and west to Ohio.



Identification: Mile-a-minute is easily identifiable by its triangular leaves and by the notorious re-curved prickles that line the stems, the leaf stalks, and even on backsides of the leaves. Fruits are developing now, emerging from the circular structures along the stem called the ocreas. They begin green, mature to an eye-catching metallic blue color, and then are carried off by birds, ants, chipmunks, and waterways.

Control: The time to get rid of mile-a-minute is running short. As it is an annual vine, the best strategy is to eliminate the maturing seeds before they can spread. Also, mile-a-minute is extremely shallow rooted and easy to pull (providing that you have the proper prickle-proof gloves). If possible, mowing the area works well and is less labor intensive. I have personally found that a hard rake is the easiest way to pull and pile up the plants. But any option in managing the invader must be carried out before the fruits mature (something they are working on right now) by mid July. Encouraging the growth of native shrubs and trees will create a canopy over the area where mile-a-minute has been removed and hit the plant in the achille's heel: shade.