

# Porcelainberry

*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*



**Background:** Porcelainberry is a woody perennial vine that was brought to the Baltimore area from Asia for landscape use. It has adapted well to the harshness of city life as it thrives in disturbed, open areas. The invasive vine is deadly to slower growing natives as it suffocates and overwhelms trees and plants by blocking sunlight from reaching their leaves. It also steals water and nutrients, takes up valuable growing space, and adds tremendous weight to the canopy of the host plant, thereby increasing the risk that it will fall over. The largest obstacle in controlling this plant is that it is still a popular plant sold in nurseries. It is then spread by water or birds that find the fruit tasty, even though the nutritional value to wildlife from invasive plants is fairly low compared to native species. While the notoriously fast-growing kudzu vine has been deemed the “Vine that ate the South”, porcelainberry has likewise been named the “Vine that ate the North”.

**Identification:** The newer growth of porcelainberry is easily recognizable with distinctive leaves possessing 3-5 deep lobes (cut outs in the leaves). The older leaves are easily mistaken for its closely related family member, the native grape. The leaves are simple, heart-shaped, toothed, and are arranged alternately along the stem. Opposite each leaf, there may be a tendril or a cluster of flowers or fruits. Small, greenish white flowers are seen in the summer, followed by ripening fruits in the fall. Porcelainberry is mainly sold today for its colorful fruits that range in color from green to white to metallic blue and purple.

The best way to distinguish Porcelainberry from the native grapes, if they are not in fruit, is by cutting into the stem. The invasive will have a white pith (center of the stem) that runs continuously through the stem, while the native will have a brown pith that is broken up at each leaf node. The bark of the native grapes will also be shreddy with age while the invasive will be smoother.

**Control:** First and foremost, never plant this vine. And spread the word to neighbors as well as to your local nursery. Remember that friends don't let friends plant invasives. If you happen to find yourself overrun by porcelainberry, plants should be killed without mercy before fruit sets (they are starting now). Vines along the ground can be pulled or mowed. If the fruit is setting, be sure to dispose of the plants like trash. To save trees being overwhelmed by invasive vines, simply cut the trunks of the vines hanging from the canopy. Cut the trunk as low to the ground as possible and then cut as high as possible creating a “window” in the trunk of the porcelainberry. This will kill the vine in the canopy and allow the tree to once again receive sunlight and survive. Never try to pull vines from the canopy, as weakened limbs could come tumbling down onto your head.

Herbicide application is an option as long as precaution is used. Wear gloves, follow instructions, and be very careful that there are no innocent native plants in the area that could be hit by herbicide accidentally and killed. Round up or Rodeo (if near streams) can be applied to the foliage or painted on a freshly cut stem late in the summer. Late July through early September is the best time to apply herbicide as the plant is moving nutrients back to the roots in preparation for dormancy. Another option if you are able to plan ahead is to cut the vines back early in the summer, and then apply herbicide to the weakened re-sprouts in late summer. Once cleared of invasives, replant the area with fast-growing native plants that will create shade and remember, and always be vigilant for new invasives on the move.