

Kudzu Encyclopedia Article

Kudzu

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Kudzu

Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*, Fabaceae) is a woody vine whose extremely rapid and aggressive growth has made it a highly successful and widely disliked invasive species throughout much of the southern United States.

Kudzu overgrowing a forest in Georgia.

A native of Asia, kudzu was imported in the late 1800s as a shade-giving ornamental, and was widely planted in the 1930s to control erosion from cotton fields. In the mild and moist climate it prefers, and without its natural predators, kudzu spreads rapidly. In the United States, it covers more than three million acres across twenty-one southern states, blanketing an area nearly the size of Connecticut.

A kudzu vine can grow as much sixty feet in a growing season. It sets new roots at each **node**, thus forming a potential new plant every two or three feet. A five-acre field abandoned to kudzu may contain one hundred thousand plants, and the foliage may be two or more feet thick. The tap roots are massive, measuring up to seven inches across and six feet deep, and weighing up to two hundred pounds or more. Kudzu vines grow up and over almost anything, including trees, barns, and telephone wires. They can starve even full-grown trees of light, water, and nutrients.

While kudzu has some nutritional value as livestock forage, it is too difficult to control to make it a valuable crop. Current eradication efforts use either repeated applications of herbicide or continuous, intensive grazing.

See Also

Fabaceae; Invasive Species.

Bibliography

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