

WEED OF THE WEEK
SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

FEATURED SPECIES: RUBBERVINE (*Cryptostegia grandiflora* & *C. madagascariensis*)

The Hawai'i Invasive Species Council (HISC) was created to better coordinate a statewide response to and management of invasive species. It is co-chaired by the Department of Land and Natural Resources and the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, and its additional members help to fill in the gaps, as well as address the many different kinds of impacts that invasive species can have on our islands. HISC's official members are the University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, Hawai'i Department of Transportation, and Hawai'i Department of Health. All working together, these members address invasive species impacts on our agriculture, environment, economy, quality of life, and health. They also participate in research, management, outreach, and prevention. To learn more about the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council, visit <http://www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/hisc/>

Today's featured weed is one that emphasizes the reason as to why it is important to have the Department of Health involved in the HISC. Besides leading the prevention efforts for mosquito born diseases like West Nile Virus becoming established in our state, the Department of Health is dedicated to assessing and responding to invasive species effects on our well-being. Most of us are aware about the effects on the environment and agriculture and understand that a healthy environment contributes to our well-being, but there are also several invasive species that directly and negatively affect human health, like our weed of the week: **Rubbervine**.

Most of the people that listen to this show like to work in their garden, and hopefully, this show will inspire more folks to go "back to the garden." Rubbervine is the gardener's nightmare. Gardener's with Rubbervine on their property have reason to be concerned. First of all, it is extremely toxic. If a child or animal accidentally eats the plant, it can actually interfere with healthy heart functioning because of the cardiac glycosides it contains. Secondly, if you live in a dry area or it is dry season, and rubbervine becomes dry, it gives off a powdery dust that has been known to cause cough attacks, nose swelling, and blisters on the eyelids. Yikes! But that's not all. Last but not least, a gardener has to worry about even coming in contact with the plant's milky sap because it can cause burning rashes and blisters. Although the Department of Health mainly focuses on diseases, it's important to remember that invasive plants can affect your health too. And if Rubbervine can make you this sick, imagine how sick it can make the forest!

Usually a vine, but can also be a bush, Rubbervine can climb as high as 45 feet into tree canopies, smothering surrounding vegetation around along way. As a gardener, if you want diversity in your yard and want to protect your fruit and ornamental trees, Rubbervine will cause some serious damage. In the forest, it crowds out native species, decreasing biodiversity beneath its thick mat. It will actually wrap so tightly around other plants, like a plant version of a boa constrictor, that it restricts growth. It can actually strangle your garden and strangle the forest.

The Kaua'i Landscaping Industry Council recognized the environmental and human health impacts of Rubbervine and pledged to voluntarily cease all sales. On Moloka'i, where there are no Miconia or Coqui Frogs to be found, Rubbervine is one of the top targets of the Moloka'i Invasive Species Committee (MoMISC). Not only do the entangled vines make it hard for their crews to remove, but the amount of seeds also make it difficult to track. Each seedpod can contain 340-840 seeds, which are easily dispersed by the wind and water. They can even survive for a month in salt water!

Like so many of our "Weeds of the Week," Rubbervine, even though a gardener's nightmare, was introduced for ornamental reasons. After all, it does have pretty flowers. But there are plenty of plants with pretty flowers that won't make the forest and us sick.

In addition to Moloka'i, infestations occur on O`ahu and Maui. Here on Kaua'i, Rubbervine is currently known only in cultivation. That gives us a great opportunity on our island to prevent Rubbervine from jumping the fence! If you have Rubbervine, please call KISC at 246-0684. This helps us to keep track of the locations of all mother plants (remember the seeds are easily dispersed), and we can help you with removal and replacement advice. Working in the garden is supposed to be a relaxing activity that is good exercise and provides you with joy and even food! Removing Rubbervine will make sure that your garden remains a place of good health and well-being.

NATIVE GARDEN ALTERNATIVE: Looking for a nice vine that won't make you sick? How about the ever-popular Maile? Plus, instead of harvesting Maile lei from the forest, you can grow it in your own backyard for those very special occasions. To learn more, check out Rick Barboza's "In the Garden" article at <http://starbulletin.com/2002/05/31/features/index10.html>