



# Kudzu

*Pueraria montana* var. *lobata* (Willd.)  
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**DESCRIPTION:** Kudzu is a climbing, semi-woody, perennial vine in the pea family. Deciduous leaves are alternate and compound, with three broad leaflets up to 4 inches across. Leaflets may be entire or deeply 2-3 lobed with hairy margins. Individual flowers, about 1/2 inch long, are purple, highly fragrant and borne in long hanging clusters. Flowering in late summer is followed by production of brown, hairy, flattened, seed pods, each of which contains three to ten hard seeds.

**ECOLOGICAL THREAT:** Kudzu kills or degrades other plants by smothering them under a solid blanket of leaves, by girdling woody stems and tree trunks, and by breaking branches or uprooting entire trees and shrubs through the sheer force of its weight. Once established, Kudzu plants grow rapidly, extending as much as 60 feet per season at a rate of about one foot per day. This vigorous vine may extend 32-100 feet in length, with stems 1/2 - 4 inches in diameter. Kudzu roots are fleshy, with massive tap roots 7 inches or more in diameter, 6 feet or more in length, and weighing as much as 400 pounds. As many as thirty vines may grow from a single root crown.

**DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES:** Kudzu is common throughout most of the southeastern U.S. and has been found as far north as Pennsylvania

**HABITAT IN THE UNITED STATES:** Kudzu grows well under a wide range of conditions and in most soil types. Preferred habitats are forest edges, abandoned fields, roadsides, and disturbed areas, where sunlight is abundant. Kudzu grows best where winters are mild, summer temperatures are above 80 degrees Fahrenheit, and annual rainfall is 40 inches or more.



**METHODS OF REPRODUCTION & SPREAD:** Kudzu grows through vegetative expansion by runners, rhizomes and vines that root at the nodes to create new plants. Kudzu also spreads through seeds contained in pods that mature in the fall.

**CURRENT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES:** Extensive root system must be destroyed. Mechanical methods involve cutting vines just above ground level and destroying material. Close mowing every month for two growing seasons or repeated cultivation may be effective. Cut kudzu can be fed to livestock, burned or enclosed in plastic bags and sent to a landfill. If conducted in the spring, cutting must be repeated as regrowth appears to exhaust the plant's stored carbohydrate reserves. Late season cutting should be followed up with immediate application of a systemic herbicide. Efforts are being organized by the U.S. Forest Service to begin a search for biological control agents for kudzu.

References: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/> <http://plants.usda.gov/>