

# Weed of the Month (November 2009)

## Peppervine



By Marian Kimbrough  
MG 2007

Photos by MG Herman Auer & MG Margie Jenke

Peppervine (*Ampelopsis arborea*) is native in the regions of Northeast Asia such as China, Korea, Japan, and the Russian Far East. It was introduced to the United States in the early 1800s and, at that time, was a much desired bedding plant because it could be used as a bush if kept trimmed, or could be trellis trained (Figure 1) for a beautiful, showy display of color from 15 to 30+ feet in height.

The desirable characteristics of its colorful berries, good ground coverage, trellis climbing ability, pest resistance and tolerance of adverse weather conditions are the same characteristics which make it extremely undesirable in the United States as an invader, today. It will quickly overtake “gardens” and kill out any desirable smaller plants that happen to be in its path. In the wild, as peppervine spreads, it can kill out native plants, which is detrimental to a natural habitat environment.

Peppervine produces an abundance of colorful berries, with each berry containing two to four seeds. The fruit is attractive food for birds and large mammals as a minor food, and for smaller mammals as a food lower on their choice of items. Wherever the feasting birds and mammals go, peppervine seeds go, too—the seeds are dispersed in their droppings, increasing the spread of this highly invasive plant.

This vine is often mistaken for poison ivy—make that commonly mistaken. **Laurel Stine (MG 2002)** stated that we get numerous submissions each year of peppervine from residents thinking they have poison ivy. The specific characteristics of this plant are a deciduous woody stalk and vine, with

non-adhesive tendrils that occur opposite and closely resemble native grapes. Newly emerged leaves are purple-red and change to a light green to dark green as they reach mature size (Figure 2).

Peppervine has inconspicuous greenish-white flowers opposite the leaves from June through August, and the berries appear from September into late fall. As a cluster of berries mature, their coloration gradually changes from green to white (Figure 3) to red to shiny blue-black (Figure 4). Berries on a given cluster mature at different rates; thus, clusters will typically consist of differently colored berries.

Management options of the peppervine plant must be both consistent and persistent over two or more years for whichever management approach is utilized. The best management option for most gardeners is hand pulling, especially during the spring season to prevent flower buds from forming. However, since it has a very deep tap root, often, an older more developed plant stalk should be cut near the ground, treating the cut stems with a broadleaf herbicide. Some broadleaf herbicides which have proven successful are those with triclopyr as an active ingredient (e.g., Brush-B-Gon and Brush Killer) and glyphosate (i.e., Roundup and Eraser). For foliar application, the use of triclopyr formulations are effective.

It is advisable to check with your local County Extension Office if you are unsure whether you are dealing with peppervine or poison ivy as neither is desirable! Be sure to take proper precautions when preparing to control the spread of plants/weeds by the use of chemical methods—Happy weeding!

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### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Ampelopsis arborea* (L.) Koehne  
Family: Vitaceae  
Group: Dicot

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### OTHER COMMON NAMES

Buckvine  
Cow Itch

