

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



Reprinted from the
Wild Ones Journal,
May/June 2008 issue.

For more information, or to join
Wild Ones Natural Landscapers,
here's how to reach us:

Phone

(920) 730-3986
(877) 394-3954 (Toll-Free)

Mail

P.O. Box 1274
Appleton, Wisconsin 54912-1274

E-Mail

ExecDirector@for-wild.org

Web Site

www.for-wild.org

The membership fee is just \$30
per year – and it's tax-deductible.

Celebrating 25 years
restoring native plants
and natural landscapes.

PORCELAINBERRY

By Janet Allen

INVASIVES ON THE HORIZON

Looking for a big impact in your garden? Want to shade an undesirable view, or create a shady sitting area under a pergola? Cover a fence? How about a plant for a small garden where vertical gardening is necessary? Need a plant for erosion control? A fast-growing vine with beautiful red stems and bright blue berries that persist into winter would be just the thing. What's more, it tolerates adverse conditions and is pest-free. All this, and it attracts birds, too.

These descriptions from current online catalogs may sound like just the plant you need in your yard. But before you send in your order, read on.

With no natural enemies to keep it in check, this plant sprawls kudzu-like over native vegetation, especially in urban and suburban areas where the soil is disturbed. It can cover trees, shutting out light and weakening them so much they collapse under the weight. Birds and mammals do indeed eat the berries – distributing them far beyond your yard.

These glowing, and not-so-glowing, descriptions are of the same vine: The woody, deciduous invader called porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*).

Some nurseries selling the plant acknowledge its aggressive nature, even while extolling its beauty. Online gardening forums mention its invasive tendencies in one posting, but in the next, declare they won't remove it because they don't see it causing any harm. Ironically, these people want to provide berries for birds, not realizing they're ultimately depriving them of the native trees and shrubs that best meet the birds' needs. It's hard to blame gardeners, though. Some universities include this plant in their online plant databases with a short note about its invasive tendencies, but otherwise treating it as they would any other ornamental.

History and current status

Porcelainberry was originally imported from China, Korea, Japan, and Russia as a bedding, shading, and landscape plant in the 1870s. Porcelainberry now occurs from New England to North Carolina, and west to Michigan. Massachusetts has officially banned this plant; Connecticut recently initiated a trial period of voluntary compliance with a similar ban.

Look-alikes

It's easy to mistake native grape vines for porcelainberry. It's important to learn how to distinguish between them, though, since native grapes belong to local ecosystems and are important to wildlife. The porcelainberries are noticeably different from grapes, but if they aren't fruiting, check the pith: The cut stems of porcelain-

Continued on page 2.



Don't mistake Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) for wild grapes. Photo by James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service. Courtesy of Forestry Images.

Continued from page 1.

berries are white, and those of grapes are brown. Also, porcelain-berry bark is smoother than the shreddy bark of mature grape vines.

Management

If you try to dig out or cut down a large vine, it can re-sprout from its taproot. Some recommend mowing it to the ground three or four times a season. It's one of those plants that may require herbicides. (Investigate this further before taking this action.) Seed may be viable in the soil for years, so plan to follow up for several seasons to fully eradicate this plant. In the meantime, don't let it flower or let the fruits develop.

If porcelainberry is already smothering your trees, you can help by removing as much as you can. Don't risk a limb crashing down on your head by yanking vines from the canopy, though. Cut them as low to the ground as possible and as high as possible to kill the vine while creating a window of light for the tree.

Native alternatives

Looking for plants with a big impact? Choose a native vine. Virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*), and trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) are beautiful alternatives. If you have space, trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) is another good choice.

For more information, visit Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Areas at www.invasive.org/eastern/midatlantic/ambr.html, or purchase a copy of *Invasive Plants of Upper Midwest* at the Wild Ones Bookstore, www.for-wild.org/store/bookstore/. *

Janet Allen is a *Journal* Contributing Editor, and a member of the Habitat Gardening in Central New York (NY) Chapter.