

# Mile-A-Minute or Devil's Tearthumb

## *Polygonum perfoliatum*

Smartweed Family (Polygonaceae)

# Invasive Plant Information Sheet

**Description:** This annual weed has elongated, branched stems that can reach lengths over 20 feet. Mile-A-Minute can climb into trees. Branches and stems are covered with small spines and can have a reddish color. The leaves are simple, alternate, triangular and 1"-3" wide. The mid-vein of the leaf also has spines. There is a very distinct saucer-shaped bract that encircles the stems at each node. New plants can be seen in late April or early May. The metallic-blue colored fruits ripen from September to November.

**Origin:** Mile-A-Minute is native to Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan and India. The first recorded specimen of Mile-A-Minute came from boat ballast in Portland, Oregon in 1890, but the weed was first reported growing wild in the late 1930's in Pennsylvania. Mile-A-Minute can now be found in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington, D.C. and West Virginia.

**Habitat:** This weed grows along roadsides, wood edges, and in fields, nurseries and other open areas. Mile-A-Minute prefers moist, well-drained soils in sunny locations. However, it may grow in wooded areas with partial shade. In temperate parts of the country, the first hard frost will kill the plant. Each year's new growth comes from the germination of overwintering seeds.

**Why it is a problem:** Extremely rapid growth (up to 6 inches per day) allows Mile-A-Minute weed to form dense mats that smother nursery tree seedlings and/or native plants. Also, since birds and rodents eat the fruits, new outbreaks can occur great distances from the original source. There is the potential in the southeastern US for this weed to become a perennial plant pest because there is no killing frost.

**Management:** Mowing, cutting or hand removal can be used to manage this weed. To avoid the spines, remember to wear gloves for hand removal of this plant. Action should be taken before large, dense areas form and before seed set. All plant debris should be removed from the site to ensure that no viable seeds are left behind. In agricultural settings, there are registered herbicides that will kill Mile-A-Minute.

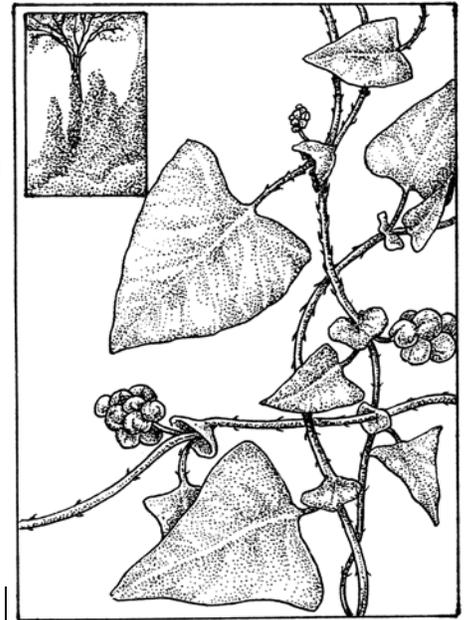


Illustration by E. Farnsworth

**Alternatives:** This plant is not used as an ornamental. However, the initial spread of the weed in Pennsylvania can be traced to the movement of infested Rhododendrons from the original nursery.

Written by:  
Tim Abbey  
CT Agricultural Experiment Station  
May 2000

**References:**  
Mountain, W.L. 1989. "Mile-a-minute (*Polygonum perfoliatum* L.) update - distribution, biology and control suggestions." *Weed Circular No. 15*, PA Dept. of Agric. 15(2):21-24.

Oliver, J.D. and N.C. Coile. 1994. *Polygonum perfoliatum* L. (Polygonaceae), the mile-a-minute weed. Botany Circular No. 29, FL Dept. Agric. & Consumer Services. 4 pp.

Stein, S. 1995. Weed Alert! Mile-a-minute (*Polygonum perfoliatum*). Fact sheet. Pound Ridge, NY. 1 page.

This fact sheet was produced by the **Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group**. For more information, visit our website at: [www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg). Printing has been funded in part by the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

