Air Potato Management in Your Backyard

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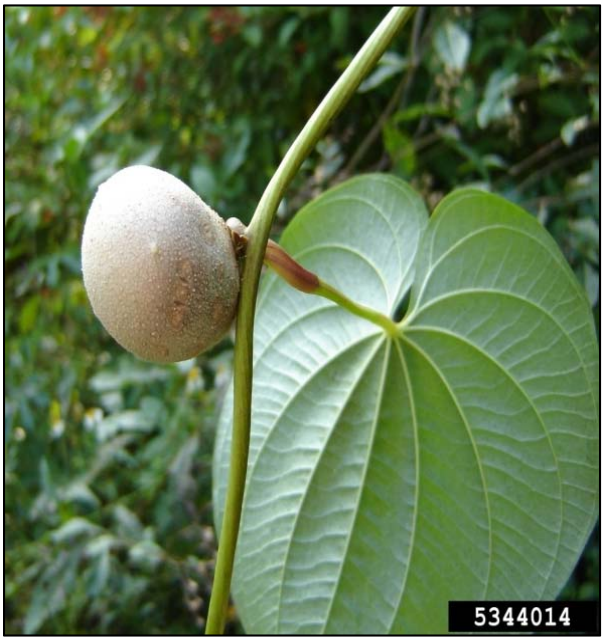

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Ridding your property of air potatoes is no easy task, but it CAN be done! There are several measures that can be taken, depending on the time of year.

WINTER	**SUMMER**
Collect air potatoes that have fallen to the ground. They may still be attached to dead vines, so pulling the vines down could result in more potatoes falling.	Cut or spray vines with herbicide in late summer (August) before the potatoes start developing. Even cutting the vines without applying herbicide will set back that year's potato production. Follow vines to their source and dig out the potatoes.
SPRING	**FALL**
Look for newly sprouting vines and follow them to the buried potatoes. Dig out the buried potatoes.	Vines will begin to die back with cold weather. Air potatoes will start to fall. Collect fallen potatoes and if possible, dig out buried potatoes.

The air potato (*Dioscoria bulbifera*) is an invasive vine from Southeast Asia. It is thought to have come to the United States via Africa during the slave trade. It grows very quickly, up to 8 inches per day and can reach over 70 feet in length (http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/133). It grows into the canopy of trees, smothering vegetation and increasing the risk of crown fires. It is spread mainly by the "air potatoes" or bulbils that form at the leaf axis. These bulbils can be various sizes and shapes. In the winter, the vine will die back and drop the bulbils. The bulbils will eventually get covered by leaves and dirt and become underground tubers, which can grow in size. In the spring, the vines will sprout from these tubers and bulbils and create the next crop of air potatoes.

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For more information on herbicide treatments for air potato vine, including recommended herbicides, application rates and treatment instructions, visit the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences website: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wg209. You should purchase a product that has one of the following active ingredients, glyphosate, triclopyr or 2,4-D. If you are applying near a waterbody, make sure you are using an herbicide that is approved for aquatic applications. Always follow the label instructions when applying herbicides!

Looking for a more eco-friendly and less labor intensive solution? Try the air potato leaf beetle (*Lilioceris cheni*)! It is a biocontrol insect that only feeds on air potato vines. It has recently been released as an approved biocontrol by U.S. Department of Agriculture and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. It defoliates the vine, depleting the resources of the underground tuber. The air potato leaf beetle has already been released on public lands throughout the state, but private homeowners are also welcome to request a shipment of beetles for their property. Requests can be sent to Eric Rohrig with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at eric.rohrig@freshfromflorida.com.

Air Potato Leaf Beetle (Lilioceris cheni) – photo by Eric Rohrig

For more information on the Army Corps of Engineers Invasive Species Management Branch, visit www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/InvasiveSpecies.aspx

Questions?
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