

MAD GARDENERS, INC
MILE-A-MINUTE VINE INVASIVE PLANT CONTROL PROJECT
Litchfield County, CT
May 29, 2012

Mile-a-Minute Vine (MAM), *Persicaria perfoliata*, is an aggressive Asian annual vine. It is capable of completely covering all vegetation up to a height of 20 feet. Plants grow at a rate of up to 6 inches a day and produce up to 2000 seeds/year. Seeds remain viable for at least 6 years, probably longer. MAM blankets the landscape, out-competing other plants, replacing native vegetation, and damaging habitat for native animals. It is a serious threat to biodiversity.

MAM has spread from Pennsylvania, where it was accidentally introduced in the mid 1930's. MAM seeds are spread short distances by birds and other animals, and longer distances by water, and with soil, mulch, and gardening materials. The first report of MAM in Connecticut was in Greenwich in 2000. It has now been reported in 24 towns and almost certainly exists elsewhere. In June 2009, a joint Connecticut DEP/University of Connecticut statement designated mile-a-minute vine a top-priority species.

The first MAM to be reported in Litchfield County was found on RT 67 on the Bridgewater/New Milford line in 2004. Volunteers started battling the plant in 2005. Mad Gardeners, Inc. initiated a MAM control project in 2007, raising money and hiring college student interns to pull MAM in the three known populations in Litchfield County.

The project goal is to prevent the spread and, where possible, eradicate populations or portions of populations of MAM. Because MAM is an annual, the only way to achieve this goal is by preventing seed production. Our basic strategy has been: 1) start early, 2) return to each site every 2-3 weeks until frost, and 3) attack the entire population.

MAM is easy to kill. The trick is finding all the plants before seeds are produced. Our workers inspect over 150 properties each year in the three populations shown on the map. Approximately 100 properties have patches of MAM. Some properties were almost covered with MAM when we started work in 2007. Others had tiny MAM patches, sometimes only a single plant. Since 2007, very little seed has been produced in the populations near New Milford High School and in the Dorwin Hill area of New Milford/Bridgewater. The full extent of the Roxbury population was not discovered until late 2011. Control operations and further exploration of that population is planned for 2012.

These populations are at the leading northern edge of MAM in western Connecticut. The just-released 2012 Connecticut Status Report on MAM states that "additional survey of the areas around all known populations is needed to determine if other currently unknown satellite populations of mile-a-minute are present nearby." The report continues: "In the New Milford/Bridgewater/Roxbury area, control actions should focus both on reducing spread to other areas and on reducing the amount of mile-a-minute vine present on private, public, and commercial properties." Our New Milford and New Milford/Bridgewater populations do not appear to have spread since 2007. We are expanding our student team this year in order to survey additional properties near the known populations and to address the Roxbury population.

This is our 6th season. Most seeds germinate in the first three years. Some MAM seeds remain viable for 6-10 years, so control is a multi-season project. Plant numbers now are minimal in the New Milford and New Milford/Bridgewater populations, but there are still a few plants in most patches. We have almost eliminated MAM seed production for five years, reducing it by well over 99 %. Our project has been successful because we address entire populations, we remove plants *before* seed production, and we recheck each known MAM patch every 2-4 weeks.

A biocontrol agent, a tiny weevil that only eats MAM, was released on two properties in 2009 by the weevil release team from the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. It is eating, it is reproducing, and it is spreading. The hope is that someday soon the weevils will reduce MAM from an ecological catastrophe to just another annoying weed.

For more information:

General information about MAM in Connecticut: <http://www.hort.uconn.edu/mam/>
Our project: www.madgardeners.com and <http://www.madgardeners.com/2012Project.pdf>

Donations are always welcome. Send tax deductible donation checks payable to Mad Gardeners Invasive Species Fund to Angela Dimmitt, Mad Gardeners, Inc., PO Box 146, Sherman CT 06784