

Invasive Species Profile: Porcelain-berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*)

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Native Range: Japan, China, Korea, and eastern Russia

U.S. Introduction: 1870s as an ornamental

Life Cycle: perennial vine

Means of Spreading: rapid vine growth; berries, eaten by birds which pass the seeds

Commercially Available: yes, especially under the cultivar, “Elegans,” though few places still stock it

Control Method: hand-pull seedlings and young plants. Mature vines may require mechanical tools, such as a Weed Wrench. Cut down large vines leaving two feet of defoliated branches; continue manually removing new growth until the plant dies.

Good Alternative Species: Fox grape (*Vitis labrusca*) or other native grape species, moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*), silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)



Figure 1. Porcelain-berry leaf and new growth vine morphologies resemble grapes but the flamboyant fruit distinguish this weed. Berry skins facing the sun tend to be lighter than the rest of the fruit.

Comments: Recently, many people asked about a strange, grape-like vine growing either in their yard or in the parks. The most conspicuous part of this newfound plant is its fruit, which ripen from August through November, and are cream, turquoise, blue, pink, and violet in color—all on the same vine! The opalescent berries sound stranger than fiction yet give this plant its common name, porcelain-berry (sometimes spelled “porcelainberry”). Such a chromatic berry sounds intriguing and attractive, and so thought the people who imported the original specimens into the northeastern United States in the latter nineteenth century. The problem with porcelain-berry is its densely foliated vines and fast growth, which together choke out groundcover, shrubs, and even some trees. Birds eat the abundant fruits and spread the seeds. Without locally native biological controls, this botanical curio grew into an out-of-control weed, hitting Virginia through New England the hardest and expanding into the Deep South and Midwest.



Figure 2. This porcelain-berry seedling has inch-long leaves. Identifying and pulling it now is easier than killing a mature vine.

Whereas *Ampelopsis* plagued Northern Virginia for decades, folks notice it now due to its soaring population. Sometimes mistaken for [kudzu](#), porcelain-berry is one of this area’s most devastating weeds, on par with [oriental bittersweet](#) and [wisteria](#). Until recently, the Fairfax County Park Authority’s Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteers at Royal Lake were unable to strike porcelain-berry as workdays focused on eradicating other high priority weeds. Earlier this year, new IMA Site Leader Angela Thornburgh led Royal Lake’s first session dedicated to porcelain-berry control. Using hand tools such as jab saws, her team first cut the vines, killing any growth above the slice and destroying developing seeds before they matured. With a Weed Wrench to minimize soil disturbance, roots were extracted thereby preventing any more sprouting.

Despite its continued, albeit limited, commercial availability, nobody would want porcelain-berry if they knew about its potential harm or

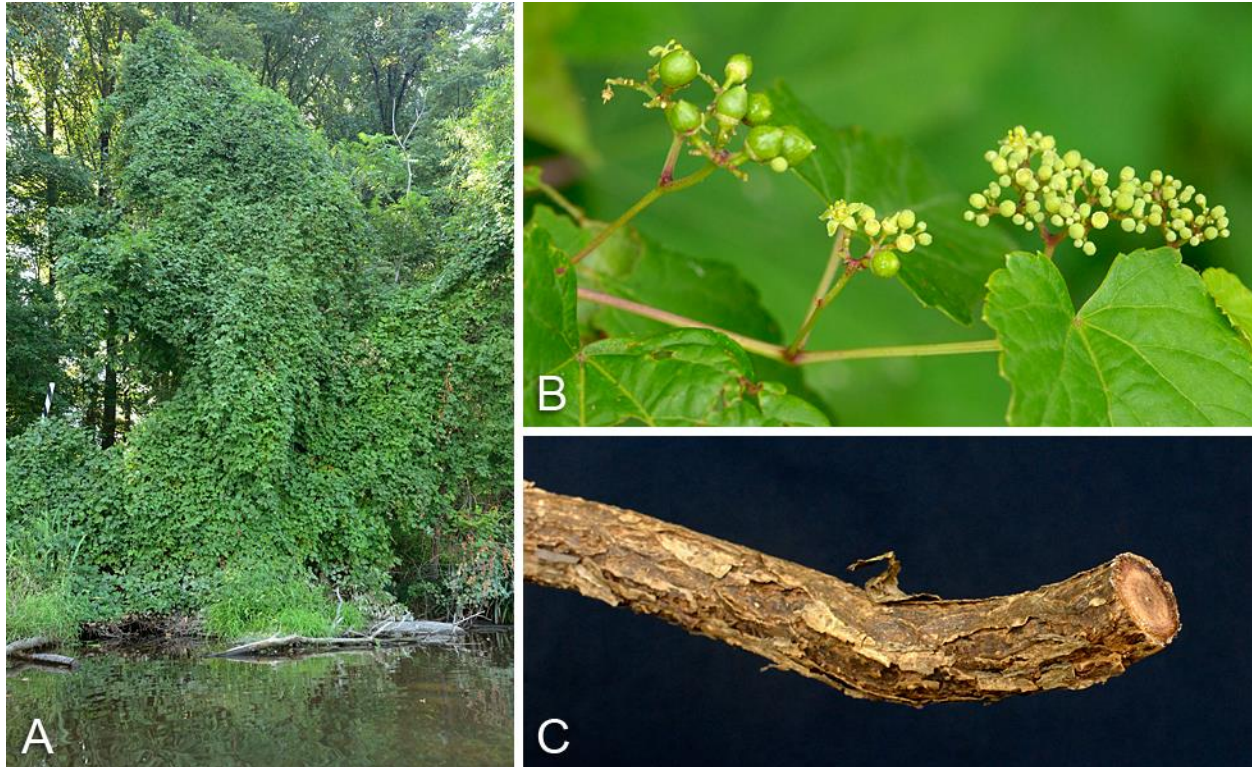


Figure 3. Left unchecked, porcelain-berry engulfs native trees (A) forming walls of vine. Before the berries ripen, one can distinguish porcelain-berry from grape because the fruits and flowers (B) always point up whereas those of grapes dangle down. Mature porcelain-berry vines (C) have light brown, blistered bark. This cut specimen shows a light pith whereas grapes have dark centers (not shown).

the hard work needed to control it. You can help your property by clearing any non-native invasive species like porcelain-berry. In doing so, the environment will benefit from your efforts! Avoid applying herbicides since the toxic sprays will likely hurt the desirable plants under the porcelain-berry. To join one of Royal Lake's IMA site leaders on a workday, please contact any or all of us asking to be on our volunteer distribution list(s):

Angela Thornburgh – anthornburgh@gmail.com
 Suzanne Doherty – jewelboxgardensbysuzanne@gmail.com
 Greg Sykes – greg@grsykes.com

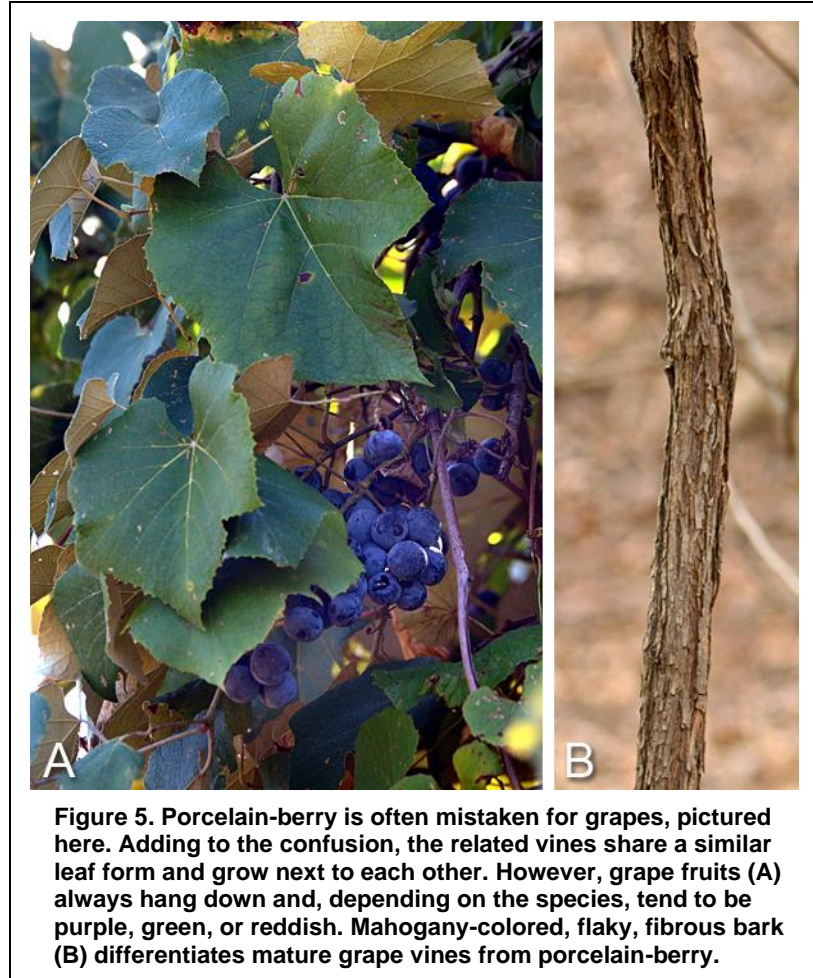
Many Virginian vines can be used as a native alternative to porcelain-berry. Grape is the most similar; while it provides the gardener with tasty snacks, it can become a handful and should be trained on a trellis. Common moonseed (*Menispermum canadense*), another vine, sports broad leaves. For chromatic berries, try silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*), which grows into a large shrub.

For more information on porcelain-berry:

<http://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/subject.html?sub=3007>
<http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=78266>
https://www.fws.gov/delawarebay/Pdfs/Porcelain-berry_Fact_Sheet%20.pdf
http://vnps.org/unwanted-unloved-porcelain-berry/www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_010236.pdf



Figure 4. Silky dogwood is an excellent native bush which produces colorful drupes.



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