



GARDEN NOTES

THE VINES THAT ATE UTAH

By Dennis Hinkamp

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If it weren't for perennial vines, the Ivy League might have been called the Groundcover League. How prestigious sounding is that?

Aggressive perennial vines are both a bother and a pleasure, admits Jerry Goodspeed Utah State University Extension horticulturist. They grow throughout Utah and most of the country. Normally they cover arbors, trellises or fences, but often grow out of control, taking over the patio, house, and even universities if left unchecked.

Although they are all pushy, the trumpet-creeper (*Campsis radicans*) is probably the most notorious for climbing into places where it is not welcome, he says. The aggression of the trumpet-creeper is useful for quickly filling in or covering an area in the landscape. It is not unusual to see it attack and conquer telephone poles, trees and sleeping dogs. Its one redeeming quality is its beautiful orange flower that appears mid-summer--about the time other plants are looking for a shady place to ride out the heat.

Yellow trumpet vine (*C. radicans* 'Flava') is not as common as the orange variety, but the plant is just as vigorous, Goodspeed says. 'Madame Galen' trumpet vine (*Campsis X tagliabuana* 'Mme Galen') has a deep orange flower. It is less hardy and slower growing.

Another driven climber is the Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*),” he adds. “It crept right out of Virginia and is now found on many older buildings on the east and west coasts, and is becoming more evident here in Utah. Its redeeming quality is its brilliant red and orange leaves in the fall. Because it is a true clinging vine with tendrils, it climbs any surface including brick, aluminum siding and wood. In the fall and winter, the birds love to snack on Virginia Creeper's blue fruit.

“One thing leads to another and the birds become a great source of dispersal for the plant. Evidence of the birds flight path can be seen in our foothills, canyons and vacant lots where this plant most likely was not intentionally planted.”

Virginia creeper can also be used as a ground cover, he adds. Although it does best as a climber, it can cover a large parcel of land quickly and hold the soil in place on any slope.

A related vine is the Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*), Goodspeed says. It can be as hostile as Virginia creeper, and is more common on older buildings, especially on college

campuses of Ivy League pedigree. The leaves have three lobes, where Virginia creeper has five distinct leaflets, giving it the appearance of a hand.

“The silver lace vine (*Polygonum aubertii*) is classified as a weed to some people, including myself,” he says. “However, like the other offensive vines in this article, it occasionally has a place in the landscape. It has no fall color, but its white, fragrant flowers bloom in the heat of summer, adding color and interest to the landscape when it needs it most.”

The last aggressive vine worth mentioning is the Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*), Goodspeed says. This plant is famous for its beautiful purple and blue flowers that are supposed to appear every spring. It can be grown as a tree, but is more commonly used to cover an arbor or trellis.

“Japanese wisteria is capable of destroying any wooden or metal structure where it is allowed to grow,” he cautions. “It can dismantle a chain link fence, tear down the sturdiest pergola, and, if left unchecked, move into the house and start rearranging the furniture. To control its destructive nature, prune it regularly to a manageable size.”

“All of these vines can be grown in most soils, and even thrive when neglected, left entirely alone or even spurned” he says. “All should be carefully watched and regularly trimmed to keep them under control. It's a good idea to carry pruners or a machete when walking near these intrusive vines. You never know when one is going to reach out and grab you.”

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