

Invasive Species Profile: Air Potato (*Dioscorea* spp.)

Identifying Characteristics

Herbaceous vine with stems up to 60 feet or more in length, twining counterclockwise and covering trees and shrubs. Leaves are alternate (*D. bulbifera*) or opposite (*D. alata*), heart-shaped, up to 8 inches in length, and bright or dark green in color. Aerial tubers or bulbils ("potatoes") are round and mostly smooth, but can be bumpy; form in the leaf axils. Bulbils range from pea to golf ball to tennis ball size. Some species, such as *D. alata*, produce underground tubers. Flowers are rarely seen and are small, in spikes to 4 inches long. Fruits are capsules with partially winged seeds.



Habitat

Commonly found in residential areas, growing on fence lines and trees, especially in shady areas. Found in vacant lots, climbing high into trees and over the ground. Invades a variety of habitats including wetlands, pinelands, hammocks, and even landfills.

Growth Habits

Reproduces prolifically from large numbers of aerial and underground tubers. Vines sprout from even small tubers. Bulbils float, aiding in dispersal. Has a dormant period in winter, dropping the bulbils which sprout in the spring.

Control Methods --- Cut-Stump or Foliar

During growing season (spring to mid-summer), cut vines to waist-high then apply triclopyr amine or glyphosate immediately. Remove tubers during winter months when vines have died back. Carefully dispose of all plant material and tubers in plastic bags; incinerate, if possible. Follow-up applications of herbicide will be necessary. Use foliar method with care if treating around desirable plants.

Florida-Friendly Replacements:

Moonflower vine (*Ipomoea alba*)

Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*)