

Mile-a-minute (*Mikania micrantha*): A New Weed in South Florida¹

Brent Sellers and Ken Langeland²

A new weed was reported in late 2009 near Homestead, FL (Figure 1). After several consultations and DNA analysis, it was determined that the plant is mile-a-minute (*Mikania micrantha*).



Figure 1. Mile-a-minute weed is a new introduction that has been found in eleven locations in the Redlands area near Homestead, Florida. It is an aggressive vine that can grow over and smother desirable vegetation and nursery crops. Photograph by Keith Bradley.

General description. Mile-a-minute is a highly branched perennial vine. Leaves are opposite and

heart-shaped (Figure 2), 2–5 inches long and 1–3 inches wide, and taper to an acute point. In Florida, it will likely flower in November and December, with seed set occurring primarily in December. Seeds are tufted (Figure 3), making them well-equipped for wind dispersal. For pictures of this plant, please see the DPI Web site at:

<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/enpp/botany/mikania-micrantha.html>.

How do I identify mile-a-minute? Identification of mile-a-minute is complicated by two very similar species that are present in Florida. Climbing hempweed (*Mikania scandens*) looks very similar to mile-a-minute, but there are some differences. Mile-a-minute tends to grow in disturbed habitats, whereas climbing hempweed favors natural habitats. Mile-a-minute has very rapid growth compared to climbing hempweed, and has pale green or yellow-green leaves with green petioles and white

1. This document is SS-AGR-328, one of a series of the Agronomy Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date January 2010. Visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Brent Sellers, assistant professor, Range Cattle Research and Education Center, Ona, Florida; and Ken Langeland, professor, Department of Agronomy, Gainesville, Florida.

All chemicals should be used in accordance with directions on the manufacturer's label. Use pesticides safely. Read and follow directions on the manufacturer's label. The use of trade names in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. UF/IFAS does not guarantee or warranty the products named, and references to them in this publication does not signify our approval to the exclusion of other products of suitable composition.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Millie Ferrer-Chancy, Interim Dean

flowers, whereas climbing hempweed has medium-green leaves with reddish petioles and pinkish flowers. The other similar species, Florida Keys hempvine (*Mikania cordifolia*), has hairy leaves and stems and larger flower heads compared to mile-a-minute and climbing hempweed.



Figure 2. Mile-a-minute is a highly branched perennial vine. Leaves are opposite and heart-shaped, 2–5 inches long and 1–3 inches wide, and taper to an acute point. In Florida, flowering typically occurs in November and December, but flowering through January may be common. Photograph by Keith Bradley.



Figure 3. Mile-a-minute seeds are wind-dispersed. Each plant is capable of producing over 10,000 seeds, but germination is thought to only be approximately 10–12%. Photograph by Andrew Derkson.

What is its habitat? Wet areas, forest borders, clearings, canal banks, rivers, roadsides, pastures, and other agricultural areas. Mile-a-minute generally invades disturbed areas. This plant does not typically grow well in heavily shaded areas.

Is it a problem? Simply speaking, yes.

Mile-a-minute is a major environmental and agricultural threat. Currently, it is recognized globally as a top 100 invasive species. It is a significant pest in plantation crops and commercial forests in West Africa and India and throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. It produces tens of thousands of fine, wind-blown seeds that disperse easily over vast areas. It also reproduces asexually and can regenerate from small cuttings.

Growth of mile-a-minute is quite rapid. It can grow at rates of at least three feet per week. This high rate of growth allows mile-a-minute to smother existing vegetation quite quickly, reducing desirable species' access to light.

How is it controlled? Mechanical control through cutting is not beneficial because this weed regrows quickly from cuttings. Uprooting and digging, though very labor intensive, is the primary mechanical method for control. We are suggesting that all plant material be incinerated if plants are removed by hand.

Chemical control methods in Florida will likely include timely applications of glyphosate or triclopyr. These must be applied prior to flowering. A 3 percent by volume solution of glyphosate in water or triclopyr at 1 to 2 pints per acre will likely be sufficient for control. Excellent control of mile-a-minute in Australia has also been found with fluroxypyr (Vista) at 1 pint per acre. Frequent scouting of the infested and surrounding areas should be performed to treat any escapes or regrowth.

What do I do if I find this weed? Since this weed shows growth reminiscent of Old World climbing fern, which has invaded many natural areas in south Florida, it is imperative that control efforts on individual populations begin immediately. To date, at least eleven separate locations in the Homestead area have been identified, and with the wind-blown seeds, we are likely to find more. If this weed is found in south Florida, please contact Florida Division of Plant Industry at 888-397-1517.