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Newsletter

The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

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Japanese Hop Vine (*Humulus japonicus*)

This plant was introduced into our country as an ornamental in the late 1800's. It is classified in the hemp family of plants (*Cannabaceae*). Due to some chemical differences, it cannot be substituted for the common beer hops. This annual vine usually has 5-lobed leaves, but upper leaves may only have three lobes; some vigorous plants may have 9 lobes. Leaves are arranged opposite each other on stems by a long leaf stalk. Leaves and stems are covered with downward pointing rough hairs (gloves are advisable when handling as some folks may experience minor skin irritations). Japanese hop may grow 35 feet in one growing season.

Individual flowers are greenish, 5-petaled with male and female flowers on different plants. Flowers grow out of the leaf axils with female flowers (0.5in) hanging down in cone shaped clusters and male flowers blooming along upright flower stems (6-10 in). Then seeds form in the female clusters.

Habitat favorable to this plant includes disturbed, open ground; along riversides, old fields and roadsides. You can view this plant locally in Riegelsville, along Durham Street (canal side) actually over-running another invasive, Japanese knotweed. I guess there is no honor among these habitat thieves! Its rapid growth highlights the danger to native plant communities by blocking light and occupying space. Seeds are dispersed by wind and water and the pollen can cause allergies. Vines can be hand pulled but wear gloves. Glyphosate (weed killer) is suitable for application on leaves before flowering and to cut stems in late summer.

If you like vines, the native trumpet honeysuckle and greenbriar are good substitutes for Japanese hop vine.

Thank you for your time, and enjoy our native plant communities.