

Pueraria lobata

[Synonyms : *Dolichos hirsutus*, *Dolichos lobatus*, *Dolichos trilobus*, *Neustanthus chinensis*, *Pachyrhizus thunbergianus*, *Pueraria argyi*, *Pueraria bodinieri*, *Pueraria caerulea*, *Pueraria chinensis*, *Pueraria hirsuta*, *Pueraria koten*, *Pueraria pseudohirsuta*, *Pueraria thunbergiana*, *Pueraria triloba*]

KUDZU VINE is a deciduous, trailing/climbing woody vine. Native to China it has small pea-like, fragrant dull reddish-purple flowers each with a yellow-patched base.

It is also known as *A'a* (Samoan), *Aka* (Niuean, Samoan, Tongan), *Akataha* (Tongan), Foot-a-night vine, *Fue'aepuaka* (Tongan), *Ge gen* (Chinese), Jack-and-the-beanstalk, Japanese arrowroot, *Kopoubohne* (German), Kudzu (English, German), *Kuzu* (Japanese), Mile-a-minute vine, *Nggariaka* (Fijian), Porch vine, Pueraria, Telephone vine, Vine that ate the South, *Wa yaka* (Fijian), Wonder vine, *Yaka* (Fijian), and *Ye ge* (Chinese).

This vine has been declared a highly invasive species (in ideal conditions it can grow as much as 60 ft. in one year and it can envelope a wooded area excluding light from all vegetation beneath – from tree tops down to tiny plants – thus smothering and killing or stunting growth).

In the United States this vine has been declared centrally a noxious weed on behalf of 35 States from as early as 1953. In addition individually the States of Kansas, Pennsylvania and West Virginia have specified it as a noxious weed. The state of Oregon has not only declared it to be an "A" designated weed but also a quarantined noxious weed. Hawaii has listed it as an alien plant– and for Tennessee it has been defined as an invasive exotic pest.

Lobata is derived from Latin *lobi*- (lobe) component.

Stems and young leaves have provided a raw or cooked vegetable –a starch extracted from the root has been made into noodles and used as a soup thickening, as well as providing a coating for deep fried foods and an alternative to aspic for coating salad. Flour made from the ground roots (known as *ko fen*) has also been used to make cakes. This was also one of the plants the Japanese used to rely on in times of famine when they ate the cooked starchy root.

The foliage is enjoyed by many wild and domesticated grazing animals including cattle, pigs and goats generally and Angora goats specifically.

Stem fibre (called *ko kemp*) has long provided material for basketry, and for making paper and coarse cloth.

Kudzu vine has been introduced to many Asian countries including Japan (in the 1700s) and India – and it first arrived in North America in 1876. In many of its new homes it has provided pasture, hay, silage, an ornamental plant (especially for screening or shade), food and medicine – and environmentalists have also cultivated kudzu vine as a blanket to halt soil erosion. Unfortunately however the vine's positive qualities have proved costly for some of these places where the plant's natural predators are absent. It has escaped from the confines of cultivation or places where it has been specifically planted to counter soil erosion and has become highly invasive. In the United States it has infested large parts of the south-eastern States and much effort is being put into finding ways to eradicate it.

South-east Asian authorities have noted that it is respected in that region primarily for its edible starchy roots and as a secondary consideration a source of medicine, fibre, animal feed, or ornamental plant, as well as a cover plant for environmental purposes.

Medicinally, Chinese herbalists consider this to be one of their 50 fundamental herbs and it would seem that they have used it since about 200 BC. In more recent times Japanese herbalists have also co-opted the vine's medicinal qualities. It has been called upon for the treatment of some heart conditions, and for migraine, fever, dysentery, diarrhoea, some intestinal disorders, colds and alcoholism. (In fact Western research at the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries has isolated a drug in both kudzu vine flowers and root that could be invaluable in treating alcoholism.) Stem poultices have also been applied to oral sores, boils and swellings.