



Weeds Won't Wait: Don't Hesitate

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*Weed Science Society of America
Invasive Plant Spotlight*

TROPICAL SODA APPLE OVERSHADOWS SOME AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

(LAWRENCE, Kan.) — Tropical Soda Apple. The name may not sound particularly threatening, but in the short time it has been known to be in the United States, Tropical Soda Apple has created a veritable crisis within Florida's agricultural industries. From cattle ranchers to hay producers and grass seed harvesters, Tropical Soda Apple has infiltrated the ranks of these agribusinesses and poses a threat to the economies of these industries.

Since it was first spotted in south Florida in the late 1980s, Tropical Soda Apple (*Solanum viarum* Dunal) has steadily moved across Florida and now is making inroads into Georgia, the Carolinas, Alabama, Texas and most other southeastern states. Its highly invasive nature earned it a spot on the Federal Noxious Weed List in 1995, and in just two decades, has resulted in the plant inhabiting all counties throughout the entire state of Florida.

Tropical Soda Apple grows up to six feet tall, has thick foliage and is armed with thorny spikes, which together create an imposing, impenetrable barrier. Seeds are dispersed when cattle and other animals feast on its fruit.

"Tropical Soda Apple leaves behind millions of dollars of damage in lost forage production, hay or sod production, and just one Tropical Soda Apple seed found among harvested grass seed condemns the entire crop," says Weed Science Society of America member Jeffrey Mullahey, who is Professor and Director of the West Florida Research and Education Center at the University of Florida. "And cattle ranchers must hold cattle for at least six days before transporting them out of state to prevent the spread of Tropical Soda Apple seeds."

Through consistent, unrelenting measures, the spread of tropical soda apple can be contained. Use of herbicides has been shown to be the most effective. However, biological control methods, such as the introduction of beetles and a plant virus are also promising options. "A regional task force was established, which brought together representatives from the agricultural industry, the state and regulatory organizations, to join forces and combat the spread of Tropical Soda Apple. As a result we have met with success in containing this aggressive species," said Mullahey.

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While tropical soda apple is just one recent example, the overall effects of weed species on the nation's agriculture, water quality, wildlife and recreation have been estimated to cost the U.S. \$34.7 billion annually, according to a recent Cornell University report. In the case of tropical soda apple, not only does it cause millions of dollars in lost forage and pasture production, but it also serves as a host plant for foreign plant viruses which can destroy vegetable crops such as tomatoes.

“The more people are aware of the issues surrounding invasive plant species, the more successful we can be in curbing their spread and limiting their destructive effects,” said Mullahey. “The Weed Science Society of America is constantly working to promote education around the issues pertaining to invasive plant species.”

For more information about invasive plants, contact Lee VanWychen, Director of Science Policy for the Weed Science Society of America, at (202) 408-5388 or visit www.wssa.net.

About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a non-profit professional society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Weed Science Society of America, promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds; provides science-based information to the public and policy makers; and fosters awareness of weeds and their impacts on managed and natural ecosystems. For more information, visit www.wssa.net.

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