



## Porcelain-berry pretty but a pest

By Dr. Susan Yost

Special to the State News

"What is that grapevine-like weed that I constantly have to pull out of my garden?" a neighbor asked recently. My guess that it was the invasive weed, porcelain-berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) in the grape family (Vitaceae), proved correct. Not surprisingly, it was easy to find a sample right near where we were standing, in a mutual friend's yard in Dover.

Porcelain-berry could easily be mistaken for one of our native grapes (*Vitis* spp.), until the distinctive fruits appear. It's a climbing vine with tendrils, and leaves that vary from three-lobed to deeply five-lobed. The beautiful speckled berries form in late summer, and change color from unripe green, to whitish, light purple, magenta, azure blue, and deep blue.

Porcelain-berry is an appropriate name, as the sheen on the berries is reminiscent of translucent ceramic. These fruits are eaten by birds, which disperse the seeds.

Porcelain-berry is native to northeast Asia, and was introduced to the U.S. in the 1870s as a bedding and landscape plant.

In the eastern U.S., in sunny open areas and along woods' edges, porcelain-berry can cloak the ground, shrubs and even trees in a dense green mantle. In spite of this aggressive growth, porcelain-berry is still sold in the horticultural trade as an ornamental plant.

Although apparently not yet well-known by name, porcelain-berry is becoming more and more of a problem, leading some to refer to it as the "kudzu of the



Submitted photo/Delaware State News

**Porcelain berry is an invasive vine with distinctive fruits and grape-like leaves.**

North", or "the vine that ate the North." It's listed as one of the worst invasives in the U.S. by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

An indication of this plant's spread is that, although it was not even mentioned in the 1963 first edition of Gleason and Cronquist's "Manual of Vascular Plants," just 28 years later it was described as "well-established as an escape from New England to North Carolina, west to Ontario and Michigan" in the 1991 second edition.

It's on the increase in Delaware as well; there are still only a few Delmarva specimens in the Claude E Phillips Herbarium collection, and it was listed only in the piedmont in McAvoy and Bennett's "2001 Flora of Delaware," whereas it has now become common in the coastal plain as well.

Porcelain-berry is easily distinguished from our native grapes by its berries; when berries aren't present, there are other more subtle ways. The tiny flowers form flat-topped greenish clusters in porcelain-berry, and more

elongated clusters in grapes.

Porcelain-berry petals are separate; whereas grape petals are joined together at the top. Porcelain-berry bark does not peel, and the pith is white and continuous at the nodes, which is not the case in many of Delaware's native grapes.

I prefer to control porcelain-berry in my garden by pulling it up by hand, although it can grow back from underground parts (and seeds). Porcelain-berry prefers sunny sites, so creating shade by planting trees and shrubs can help control it. Herbicides are sometimes recommended.

Pretty but a pest; don't plant porcelain-berry!

*Editor's note: Dr. Susan Yost is an educator of the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium on the campus of Delaware State University. The herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 857-6452 to arrange a tour of the herbarium, or for more information about this article.*