

DODDER VINE - THE VAMPIRE PLANT

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Have you ever heard of a plant called strangleweed, goldthread, or hellbine? How about dodder vine? This vampire-like plant is commonly called dodder vine and it is a genuine plant parasite. Golden yellow to orange in color, this vine has limited chlorophyll and cannot make sufficient food for itself. Because of this problem, dodder vines must function as parasites as they need to obtain nourishment from other plants. Let's take a closer look at this local wild plant.

An annual plant, dodder vine starts from seed. This seed came from a mother plant that had the potential of producing at least 16,000 seeds in a season. If these seeds do not find a suitable environment in which to germinate, they have the ability to remain viable and dormant in the soil for over 60 years. Once a dodder seed germinates it has only a few days to find and attach to a food plant or it will die. As the seedling begins to grow it will move and reach out with its worm-like vining habit to hopefully latch onto a suitable host such as onions, peas, beans, potatoes, mums, ivies, petunias, and a multitude of native plants. Once a host is found, the dodder vine coils around its victim and

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inserts root-like branches into the plant. These make the connection that the dodder vine needs to survive.

Dodder vines are very eye-catching as they are not only odd-looking, but also somewhat colorful. I recently saw an infestation that was 10 feet wide and 30 feet long covering an undisturbed area of salt-bush. Imagine plants seemingly covered by an almost neon yellow tangle of wiry, leafless vines. In addition to yellow dodder, I have seen some orange in color as well as a light greenish-white type. Not only is dodder vine a parasite, but it is also known to spread various plant diseases.

What can you do if you have a dodder vine infestation? Keep in mind that dodder seeds can last for a long time and are spread by water, live-stock manures, and old previously infested plant materials. There are no specific selective herbicides available to control this weed. Also, even if you used a non-selective herbicide, not only will the dodder vine be killed, but also the desirable plant as well. Your best bet is to hand pull the dodder and its infested host all at once. It is especially important that you destroy the dodder vine before it sets seeds.

The dodder vine can be a challenging pest to deal with. However, with some knowledge and skill you can defeat this "vampire plant" in your landscape.

Resources:

- Friday, F. (2001) Friday's Feature – Dodder. Santa Rosa County UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Duever, L.C. (2004) Floridata – Cuscuta spp. Tallahassee, Florida.

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