

# **Air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*)**

## **What is it?**

A vigorously twining, very invasive vine with heart-shaped leaves growing from an underground tuber. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council ([www.fleppc.org](http://www.fleppc.org)) considers this one of Florida's worst weed pests.

## **Where is it from?**

Native to tropical Asia.

## **How did it get here and when?**

Likely introduced as an ornamental and food plant around 1905.

## **What harm does it cause?**

Grows rapidly, covering and displacing desirable native plant species needed by wildlife.

## **How can I help?**

1. Learn to identify air potato vines. Please don't transport or plant the vines or "potatoes."
2. Remove them from your home landscape and neighborhood.
3. If you see the vines or "potatoes" along our trails, please remove and bag them. Be sure to dispose of them in the trash cans on site.

## What more can I do?

1. Join the Friends of Red Bug Slough Preserve to help out with organized air potato removal events and “spud busting” work days.
2. Educate others to help them identify and remove this highly invasive pest plant.
3. For additional information on control, go to:  
<http://bcrc1.ifas.ufl.edu/airpotatobiologicalcontrol.shtml>

## The good news is...there is HOPE!!

1. The air potato leaf beetle (*Lilioceris cheni*) from China has been studied for several years and tested on hundreds of plant species to make sure it only feeds on air potato vines.

2. Extensive testing resulted in essentially no damage to any other plants.
3. The USDA has determined it's now safe to request and release these beetles in Florida.
4. Air potato leaf beetles are now present at Red Bug Slough Preserve. Look for these small, bright red and black beetles on air potato vines showing extensive leaf damage.
5. Homeowners can order beetles for release in residential areas by filling out a request form at:  
<http://bcrc1.ifas.ufl.edu/airpotatobiologicalcontrol.shtml>