



# Whatcom Weeds

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## KUDZU

### *Pueraria lobata*

**THREAT:** Kudzu, a native of Japan, was introduced to North America in 1876 as an ornamental, and was later promoted for livestock forage and erosion control. It is an extremely aggressive perennial vine. Kudzu vines can grow up to one foot a day, during peak growing season, (up to 60 feet in a growing season) and climbs over anything in its way. In the southeastern U.S., where it is now common, kudzu has caused power outages by toppling power poles and trees. Aside from damaging trees due to its sheer weight, the vine can also kill other vegetation by blocking out all light and by girdling trunks. Kudzu grows in a variety of habitats and environmental conditions, and rapidly invades disturbed areas. It outcompetes native vegetation and causes a loss of wildlife habitat, as well as impacting agriculture and timber production. It reproduces by seed and by spreading roots that develop adventitious shoots. Birds and mammals can disperse seeds. Kudzu has recently been found in Oregon and the first site in Washington was found in 2001, in Clark County.



**DESCRIPTION:** Kudzu is a perennial, climbing or trailing vine, in the legume family. The stems of this plant are semi-woody, growing up to 4 inches in diameter and 100 feet in length. Young vines are covered with tan to bronze hairs, older vines are usually hairless. The dark green leaves are made up of three leaflets, each leaflet having 1 to 3 lobes. The leaflets have hairs on both sides and are usually 3 to 4 inches long. Leaves are dropped in the fall and vines grow new leaves in the spring. Up to 30 vines may radiate from one root crown. The roots are fleshy, with the taproot reaching 6 feet or more in length, 7 inches in diameter and weighing up to 400 pounds. Vines will root at the node, where they contact soil. The connection to the mother plant eventually dies and a completely new plant develops from these roots. The reddish-purple, pea-like, fragrant flowers appear in late summer. The individual flowers are just under an inch across and are borne in hanging clusters, up to 7 inches long, at leaf axils. They produce a flattened, hairy pod, growing up to 3 inches long. Each pod contains numerous kidney-shaped seeds, looking similar to dried beans.



**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Kudzu can be controlled using mechanical or chemical means. Mechanical options include cutting, disking and digging. Persistent cutting of small stands may eventually kill out the roots. Cutting can also be used in conjunction with herbicides. Old established stands are difficult to eradicate with mechanical means due to the size and depth of the root system. Overgrazing by cattle has been used as a control method and works best on younger stands. Cattle are used to keep the plants defoliated for 3 to 4 growing seasons. This basically starves the roots out. For chemical recommendations, contact the weed control board. For any method used, the area must be rechecked for several seasons to ensure eradication is complete.