

Kudzu: The Plant We Love to Hate

-by Gerald Reid

Kudzu, a member of the legume family, was first introduced to this country in 1876 at the Centennial Expo in Philadelphia. It was exhibited by Japan.

Kudzu was initially sold as an ornamental plant. Later, it was used as animal fodder. During the depression, the federal government promoted the plant as a tool to be used in erosion control, even paying farmers to grow it.

It wasn't until the 1950's that the government recognized that kudzu was a problem and stopped promoting it. By then, it was too late.

Kudzu can grow a foot in one day. It doesn't take long for it to takeover a tree or barn. It can kill a tree by cutting off the sunlight.

To kill kudzu, you must kill the root system. This has proven to be a challenge for even the most determined individual.

Some have found uses for kudzu. The vine can be used to make baskets. Jelly can be made from the blossom.

At the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Research Service, scientists discovered a fungus that would control kudzu. When *Mountain Peeks* asked about the current status of this fungus, Dr. Doug Boyette replied, "We are continuing to conduct research on biocontrol of kudzu with the fungal pathogen *Myrothecium verrucaria*. We have had some industrial interest in developing this fungus as a commercial product. We are optimistic that an industrial partner will soon license and register this as a bioherbicide for kudzu and other weeds." Dr. Boyette could not venture an accurate estimate as to when this product would be available, only offering that three to five years after licensing and registration is probably a reasonable estimate.

MeMa's Kudzu Jelly

4 cups kudzu blooms (compressed with stems & unopened bloom removed)
4 cups boiling water
2 tablespoon lemon juice
1 pkg Sure-jell or pectin
4 1/2 cups sugar

Wash & cook blooms, place in large bowl, and pour boiling water over them. Cover. Refrigerate 8-10 hours.

Pour mixture into jelly bag or drain through cheesecloth. Discard blooms. Put juice into large Dutch oven or stock pot.

Wisk in pectin & lemon juice and bring to a rolling boil. (Pectin & lemon will turn liquid to a pretty red - purple color.) Add sugar. Mix and bring back to a rolling boil. Boil one minute, stirring constantly.

Skim off foam with metal spoon & pour into sterile hot jars. Let cool and seal with paraffin.