

CONSERVATION CORNER

## Persistence with kudzu is the key



**Newt Hardie**

**I**t all started in 2001 with one cherry tree under attack from kudzu. The intent was to save a cherry tree on South Pine Street from kudzu without using a herbicide.

Everyone thought it was a crazy idea because common belief held that fighting kudzu was hopeless — the invasive vine was unstoppable and invincible. Better to pass it by on the other side and move on to something doable.

Secondly, it was considered crazy because spraying with a strong herbicide was the normal approach, but we proposed to free this cherry tree from its kudzu infestation without spraying to avoid herbicidal dangers.

The literature back then — from college researchers, horticulturists, etc. — universally proclaimed that the only non-herbicidal way to kill kudzu was to dig out the roots. Excavating the roots is impractical for the larger, older kudzu plants because some of those roots go 16 feet deep.

After hundreds of tests, we proved that digging up roots was not necessary. The evil invader can be killed one plant at a time by decapitating the crown — the source of all vines — from its roots. The root has no buds and

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cannot sprout vines.

This story and the removal protocols are available in detail at [www.KOkudzu.com](http://www.KOkudzu.com), as in “Knock Out kudzu.”

Kudzu attacks native trees from top and bottom. From above, the leafy vines shroud the tree's leaves so that they cannot photosynthesize, thereby shutting off its source of life. Kudzu's roots go deeper than those of native trees and can steal water from tree roots. Drought can kill a tree but does not dispatch the pesky kudzu.

An acre of mature kudzu can have 50,000 to 175,000 individual kudzu plants — two to four plants per square foot. It takes three or four years to achieve control.

The hardest part is getting started. The first removal is the toughest. After that, persistence is the key.

The Kudzu Coalition morphed into the **Trees Coalition** in 2013, but the organization still tackles about 10 new kudzu sites every year — roadsides, trails, parks, neighborhoods. The group and its volunteers have totally eradicated kudzu from 41 sites and continue to contain the green monster at 102 sites.

The original cherry tree on South Pine and probably 1,000 more trees have been cleared of “the

vine that ate the South.”

To learn how to kill kudzu without using herbicides, come to Hatcher Garden any Wednesday at 9 a.m., email [TreesCoalitionSC@gmail.com](mailto:TreesCoalitionSC@gmail.com), or call 864-582-0990 to find out where the Trees Coalition will be working on a Saturday. We provide easy, hands-on instructions. You, too, can be a kudzu killer.

Removal protocols are different for other non-native invasives such as privet, wisteria, elaeagnus, bamboo, honeysuckle, tree of heaven (locally called tree from hell) and others, but the process is the same; Get started, learn how, repeat the process, have patience, and do it again and again.

When is the best time to get started? Today.

This work is not hard. The exercise is good for your health, and the results provide positive feedback. You can make a difference in your environment, your community, your neighborhood, and for your children or grandchildren.

Begin today! Nothing happens until you start.

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