

# Biocontrol Agent of Mile-A-Minute Weed is Now Widely Available for Advance Ordering

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Mile-a-minute weed (*Persicaria perfoliata*) is a highly invasive annual vine that is having an impact at many sites on the East End and other parts of Long Island. The weed is invading natural areas; particularly woods and thickets, stream banks, disturbed sites, and roadsides. It thrives in areas where there is partial shade but can survive in full sun. It is often found on the edges of homeowner properties near woods and sometimes on the periphery of field nurseries.

Disturbed areas created by Superstorm Sandy in 2012 have become welcome niches to the seedlings of this weed. Having a vining habit, the seedlings are early risers and begin to germinate in early April in the western part of Long Island. The spindly single stems grow straight upwards and the recurved prickles on the back of the leaves and the petioles 'grab' onto any nearby upright. Using this claw like ability for support, the plant doesn't expend energy in twining or developing thick stems. This, in turn, allows for the rapid upright growth in the spring and summer that gives the plant its nickname: 'Mile-a-Minute' vine.

Other common names include Asiatic tearthumb, climbing tearthumb, devil's-tail. These refer to the sharp downward curved prickles. Any attempts to hand pull this weed without heavy leather gloves will really illustrate why 'tearthumb' is used to describe it. It takes advantage of most of the growing season on Long Island to produce multi-branched, thin-stemmed vines that are



Adult *Rhinoncomimus latipes* feeding on young mile-a-minute leaves.

loaded with attractive fruit. When ripe, the individual shiny black seeds are contained within a fleshy blue fruit. The fruit are very easily knocked off the vine and are often spread to new sites by migrating birds and other wildlife.

Because the ripened fruit are so easily dislodged, it is not recommended to hand pull the vines after fruit begin to form in late July. Recent research has shown that even immature green fruits can eventually mature off the vine to produce viable seeds for re-infestation. However, that leaves the months of May, June and most of July to use cultural practices like hand pulling, string trimming or mowing to suppress and control this weed. Because it has an annual life cycle, removing young plants has a very reasonable chance of significantly reducing the population. In addition to cultural practices, the NYSDEC has approved

a 2(ee) exemption for glyphosate (Accord XRT II EPA Reg. No. 62719-556) (Rodeo EPA Reg. No. 62719-324) for post-emergent control in noncrop areas. Because glyphosate is non-selective, it should be used in areas where no other desirable vegetation would be exposed to drift. However, in such areas, where many seedlings are growing, this can be an efficient method to control young plants.

Since 2004, a biological control has been released to help suppress this weed. Developed by Dr. Judy Hough-Goldstein at the University of Delaware, a small weevil (*Rhinoncomimus latipes*) was found to feed on



*Mile-a-minute weed damaged by  
*Rhinoncomimus latipes* feeding*

the leaves and stem without eating other desirable plants. On eastern Long Island the weevil has been evaluated with controlled releases since 2012. Also, it has found its way here from the surrounding states that have been using the weevil to manage this weed. The weevil will begin to feed on the leaves early in the spring and continue all season. Eggs are laid in the stem and the larvae weaken the stem as they develop and begin to feed. The adults overwinter in the leaf litter at the ground surface. Unfortunately, there is a lot more weed than weevil, so we need to continue to try to increase the weevil population. Further information on the weevil can be found at: <http://www.nyis.info>.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is no longer requiring any special permitting to release the weevils (*Rhinoncomimus latipes*). This year, for the second year, the Phillip Alampi Beneficial Insect Rearing Laboratory with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture is offering weevils for sale to the general public. Contact Cyndi Detweiler-Hill, [cynthia.detweiler@ag.state.nj.us](mailto:cynthia.detweiler@ag.state.nj.us), to obtain an order form. The weevils cost a dollar per weevil, with a minimum of 500 needed for an order. If you are interested, place your order before the end of March 2020 for weevils to be shipped in July. ●



*Mile-a-Minute weed overrunning a wooded area.*