Macfadyena unguis-cati (L.) A. Gentry

Common Name: Cat’s-claw vine
Synonymy: Doxantha unguis-cati (L.) Rehd., Bignonia unguis-cati L., Bignonia tweediana Lindley
Origin: Tropical America
Botanical Description: High-climbing woody vine, with stems to 6 cm (2.4 in) in diameter and roots becoming elongate-tuberous with age. Branches and runners with adventitious aerial roots. Leaves opposite, compound, with 2 leaflets and a terminal 3-forked tendril; tips of tendril forks stiffly hooked, clawlike. Leaflets mostly 3-7 cm (1-3 in) long, oval to lance shaped, with margins entire. Flowers showy, trumpet shaped, to 7 cm (3 in) long and 10 cm (4 in) across, solitary or in few-flowered clusters at leaf axils; petals joined into yellow floral tube with orange lines in the throat. Fruit a linear, flat capsule, to 50 cm (20 in) long, with oblong, winged seeds.

NOTE: Distinguished from the native cross-vine, Bignonia capreolata L., by its yellow (rather than orange red) floral tubes and clawlike tendril forks. From a distance, when flowering, may be confused with yellow trumpet-flowered native jessamines (Gelsemium spp.), but their leaves simple and without tendrils.


Distribution: Native from West Indies and Mexico to Argentina (Bailey and Bailey 1976, Morton 1971a). In Florida, documented as invading sandhill, scrub, upland pine forests, hardwood hammocks, and ruderal communities. Documented by herbarium specimens from 15 counties scattered throughout the state of Florida from Escambia County in the Panhandle, east to Duval County, and south to Miami-Dade County (Wunderlin and Hansen 2004). Has also been reported from natural areas in Putnam, Marion, Pasco, and Pinellas counties (FLEPPC 2005). Also cultivated in Alabama, Louisiana, and South Carolina (Meyer et al. 1994).

Life History: Thrives in full sun or partial shade and in a wide variety of soils (Morton 1971a, Nelson 1996). Stays at seedling stage for some time, while enlarging roots into tuberlike storage organs; then rapidly elongates stems, forming long runners when no erect substrate is within reach (Godfrey 1988). Clings tenaciously to any substrate with adventitious roots and clawed tendrils (Godfrey 1988). Flowers in spring, with high seed production (Menninger 1970), but may not begin flowering until vine is well established (Odenwald and Turner 1980). Seeds dispersed by wind (Dickey 1968).