

Introduction Reading

Air Potato Leaf Beetle (Suggested Common Name), *Lilioceris cheni* Gressitt and Kimoto (Insecta: Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae: Criocerinae)¹

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Introduction

Air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera* L., Dioscoreaceae) is a herbaceous, perennial twining vine that attains lengths of 20 m or more, rendering it capable of climbing over and smothering native vegetation (Schmitz et al. 1997, Overholt et al. 2008, Figure 1).



Figure 1. Air potato infestation at Snyder Park in Fort Lauderdale. Credits: Ted D. Center, USDA/ARS Invasive Plant Research Laboratory, Fort Lauderdale, FL.

The native range of air potato includes much of Asia and Africa, and recent molecular evidence suggests that air potato in Florida originated from China (Croxtton et al. 2011). Air potato was introduced to Florida in 1905 when it

was sent to the USDA by Henry Nehrling, who later noted its invasive potential (Morton 1976). It has since become extremely aggressive (Hammer 1998). By the 1980s, air potato vines were growing in thickets, waste areas, and hedges or fencerows in many parts of south and central Florida (Bell and Taylor 1982). By 1999, air potato was recognized as an invasive exotic that alters plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structure, and disrupting ecological functions (FLEPPC 2003). A leaf feeding beetle, *Lilioceris cheni*, was recently introduced into Florida from China for biological control of air potato. This article provides information on the distribution, appearance, life cycle, host range and importance of the beetle.

Distribution

The air potato leaf beetle is native to Asia. Country records include China, India, Nepal, Laos, and Thailand (Kimoto and Gressitt 1979, Tishechkin et al. 2011). The beetle was first released in Florida in 2012 for biological control of air potato.

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