

PEST ALERT

FDACS-P-01940

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Dolichandra unguis-cati (L.) L.G. Lohmann, catclaw vine, a recently listed State Noxious Weed

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INTRODUCTION

The perennial, woody climbing vine *Dolichandra unguis-cati* (L.) L.G. Lohmann (Bignoniaceae) has been added to the Florida Noxious Weed and Invasive Species List. This plant was presented to the Noxious Weed Review Committee. Weed assessments by the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas and USDA-APHIS Weed Risk Assessment provided supportive information (APHIS, 2019; UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas, 2020). *Dolichandra unguis-cati* is also listed by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council as an invasive species that has altered natural plant communities (Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, 2019).

The committee found that the species exhibits the following characteristics typical of invasive agricultural and environmental weeds:

- Broad climate suitability (environmental versatility)
- Climbing or smothering growth habit
- Shown to form dense thickets
- Naturalized beyond native range
- Propagated both by wind-dispersed seeds and vegetative reproduction

Based on the assessments of the invasion of natural areas by this species, *Dolichandra unguis-cati* is now included on the list of regulated plants in Florida. It is unlawful to introduce, multiply, possess, move or release any noxious weed or invasive plant regulated by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, except under permit issued by the department.

This species has previously been known as *Macfadyena unguis-cati* and *Bignonia unguis-cati*. References to catclawvine, cat's claw vine or cat's-claw vine as well as the two Latin synonyms may be found in the literature.

IDENTIFICATION

This species is a perennial climbing vine. Mature stems are woody, arising from a deep taproot that often bears a walnut-sized tuber-like swelling. The plant has two forms, with different leaf types. When this species first appears above ground, leaves are opposite and simple, roundish in shape, 2-5 cm across. When the plant begins to climb as a vine, the leaves are opposite and compound, with two leaflets and often a third leaflet modified into a distinctive, easy to recognize, three-pronged "claw" (Fig. 1). The leaflets are narrowly ovate, 3-5 cm long and 1-2 cm wide, with a tendril or "claw" that aids in climbing and clinging. A mature vine creates a thick blanket of foliage that can smother vegetation beneath it. As leaves grow older, the claw-like tendrils tend to fall off, leaving only the pair of full-sized leaflets. Flowers are large, showy, yellow and trumpet-shaped, appearing for a short period in the spring (Fig. 2). Fruit is a long, slender, flattened seed pod, initially green, but maturing to dark brown. The fruit splits open to release up to 50 brown, papery, winged seeds that are dispersed by wind (Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2019; UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, 2020; Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2020).

SIMILAR SPECIES IN FLORIDA

Several vining species in Florida have some similarity to catclaw vine, but two of these species have regularly been confused with it: *Bignonia capreolata* and *Gelsemium sempervirens*. *Bignonia capreolata*, crossvine, usually has red-orange flowers, but plant breeders have developed yellow or yellow and red forms that are quite similar to catclaw vine (Fig. 4). This vine also has leaves with two leaflets and a climbing tendril, but the tendrils terminate with adhesive disks. The three-pronged claw or tendril used for climbing by *Dolichandra unguis-cati* is distinctive and provides an easy means for identifying the species, if new growth on



the vine is available to examine these tendrils. *Gelsemium sempervirens*, known as Carolina jessamine or yellow jessamine, also has tubular, yellow flowers, but its opposite leaves are simple. Each leaf is roughly the same size and shape as a leaflet of catclaw vine. This species is among the earliest spring-blooming species and usually finishes flowering before catclaw vine flowers appear (Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2020).

DISTRIBUTION

Catclaw vine is now vouchered from numerous counties throughout Florida, including a few in the Panhandle, but concentrated in the central and southeastern peninsula, especially in urbanized areas. It colonizes disturbed areas and edges of woods and can invade forested areas where it climbs high into the tree canopy. Most of Florida presents favorable habitat for the plant, and it appears its range is currently expanding (Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2020).

REFERENCES

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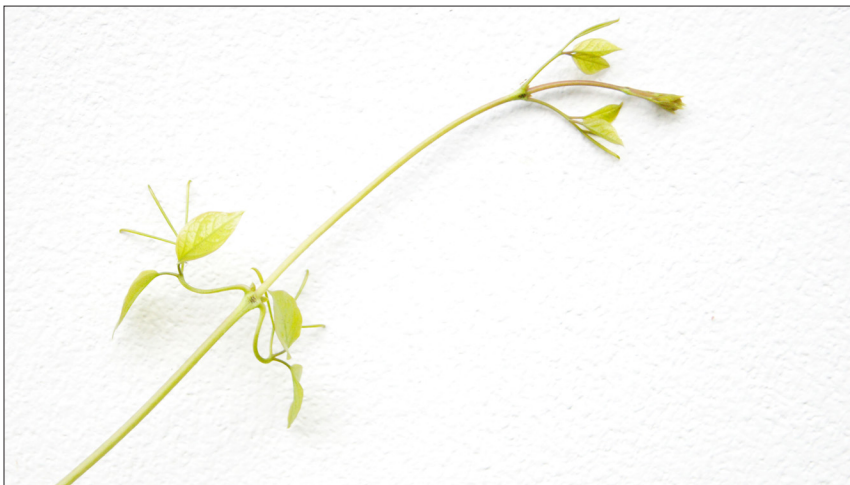


Figure 1. *Dolichandra unguis-cati*, catclaw vine.
Photo from Shutterstock



Figure 2. *Dolichandra unguis-cati*, catclaw vine.
Photo by Roger Hammer, [Atlas of Florida Plants](#)



Figure 3. *Bignonia capreolata*, crossvine (yellow form).
Photo from Shutterstock



Figure 4. *Gelsemium sempervirens*, Carolina jessamine or yellow jessamine
Photo by Mary Keim, [Atlas of Florida Plants](#)