

## Invasive Species: **Japanese Virgin's Bower** (*Clematis terniflora*)


by Lorraine Van Slooten

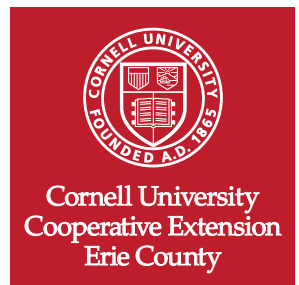


Also known as Sweet Autumn Clematis, this vine was introduced to the U.S. as an ornamental plant in the 1860s, and has now spread throughout the eastern half of the U.S. In New York State it is listed as a regulated invasive plant, i.e. it can be transported, sold and planted, but must be labeled as an invasive and planted where it's not likely to infest natural areas. The vine grows in well-drained sandy, loamy or clay soils and tolerates a wide variety of soil pH values. It prefers its roots shaded and foliage in full sun. Vines can grow to 30 ft. long, but lack tendrils to attach to a trellis and must lean on the shrubs or trees that support them or grow as a thick ground cover. This dense blanket can eventually smother the vegetation that supports the vines or tries to grow under them. *Clematis terniflora* invades forest edges, hedgerows, stream banks and urban green space along roads and streams.

The native Virgin's Bower (*Clematis virginiana*) has ornamental qualities similar to the invasive species, but is less aggressive. It has toothed and lobed leaves with three leaflets in a terminal cluster while *C. terniflora* has small heart or oval shaped leaves with two lateral leaflets plus three leaflets in a

terminal cluster. *C. terniflora*'s fragrant white one inch flowers have both stamens and pistils on each flower with anthers that are longer than 1.5 mm. They bloom from August to September. *C. virginiana*'s similar small white flowers are not fragrant, have male and female parts on separate flowers and anthers that are less than 1.5 mm long. They bloom slightly earlier in the season – from July to August. The native species serves as a source of pollen and nectar for many pollinating flies as well as wasps and bees. As many as 50 species of insects are attracted to the flowers.

*C. terniflora* blooms more prolifically than the native species; its mounds of fragrant blossoms a beautiful sight in late summer. But that means more seeds are later dispersed by the wind and germinate in a new area in the next growing season. The new plants can be dug out or pulled to control this invasive species, but as many roots as possible should also be removed. Root segments do re-sprout and seeds still in the soil continue to germinate, so pulling plants for a few seasons may be necessary. Unfortunately, both species are sometimes still sold interchangeably at nurseries. 



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