

Have you been noticing a bright green vine that has been climbing up trees and fences this summer? What you are seeing is wild cucumber (*Echinocystis lobata*), a member of the Cucurbitaceae family which includes cucumbers, squash, and melons. Wild cucumber is a native plant of Wisconsin and most of North America. As an annual, wild cucumber dies every winter, but can come back again in the spring since the plant is very good at reseeding itself.



Wild Cucumber is a rapid-growing plant that can achieve 25-30 feet of growth in a year! It is commonly present in road ditches, swamps, and other rural areas. Due to the aggressive growth and vining habit on trees or shrubs, wild cucumber is often considered a weed, however it is NOT an invasive species.

You are likely seeing more wild cucumber this year due to last year's drought. When a plant is stressed, it often produces more seeds to try to protect itself. This is then seen as an increase in the presence of the plant the following year, due to the larger number of seeds present in the soil.

What can you do to control wild cucumber?

For homeowners, the good news is that it can be easily controlled in the spring with pulling or hoeing small plants. If you have plants larger than 2 feet tall, cutting the vines near the base can be effective, although you may have to repeat this treatment, as this is a persistent annual that can regrow. Herbicides can be effective in controlling wild cucumber while the plant is relatively small and PRIOR to climbing on another plant. After wild cucumber starts climbing another plant, it becomes impractical to apply herbicide without causing damage to the underlying plant. Any control method is best done prior to plant flowering and fruiting to prevent production of viable seeds. Continual removal of wild cucumber plants in an area on a yearly basis will eventually deplete the seed bank so that no more plants can sprout in the area.

For more information on the biology of wild cucumber, please visit:

http://wimastergardener.org/sites/wimastergardener.org/files/Echinocystis_lobata.pdf or go to <http://wimastergardener.org> and search "wild cucumber" to find the relevant information.

If you have garden or agriculture questions, please contact Lyssa Seefeldt, Marquette County UW-Extension Agriculture Agent at 608-297-3141 or lyssa.seefeldt@ces.uwex.edu.