

BENGHAL DAYFLOWER INVADERS THE SOUTH

Benghal dayflower (*Commelina benghalensis*), also called tropical spiderwort, is invading the American South. Present in the United States for seven decades and on the Federal Noxious Weed List since 1983, its population has recently exploded, smothering fields of cotton and peanuts.

Observed in only five Georgia counties in 1999, “by 2003 it was a moderate to severe pest in 29 counties in Georgia and occurred in over 50 Georgia counties,” says Theodore M. Webster, a research agronomist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Tifton, Georgia. It is also considered a serious pest in Florida and has spread to North Carolina.

While increasing awareness of the weed may account for some of the apparent spread, “the importance and troublesomeness of this weed has definitely increased,” says Webster. He speculates that inadequate pest management strategies are also abetting the increase. “Glyphosate-based pesticides,” he says, “are not very effective on tropical spiderwort, offering less than 55 percent control.”



Benghal dayflower, left, looks deceptively benign. In the photo above, USDA research agronomist Theodore Webster stands amid a Georgia cornfield that has been entirely overtaken by the plant, leaving only a few cornstalks to stand.

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