

8 November Garden Column

Kudzu and other miscalculations

Everyone knows about kudzu, the alien vine that was introduced to control erosion and has been happily eating the South ever since. It may surprise you to know that there is a bug whose favorite snack is kudzu. The insect, *Megacopta cribraria*, was invited to the US as a biological control for kudzu since it keeps that nuisance under control in Japan where both are native.

Another thing that may curb overproduction in Japan is that kudzu is eaten by people. Even here, deep-fried kudzu greens are delicious and healthy eating but word has not gotten out? In 2009 the kudzu bug arrived in Georgia and shortly thereafter began its migration northward. Recently it has been found in Patrick County, Virginia.

In a research plot in Athens, Ga. *Megacopta* did reduce kudzu growth by 32% but although the foliage can be eliminated, the roots are huge and can extend 12 feet into the ground, which of course made it adept at erosion control. A more serious problem is that this small square insect will dine on other legumes when kudzu is not on the menu. Those others include soy, lima, and green beans. The kudzu bug does not eat beans but reduces production by sucking on the main stems.

The plant world is full of those lessons provided by good intentions that have gone astray. This information came from an article by Jennifer Gagnon, Extension Associate in Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation that appeared in a recent issue of Virginia Forest Landowner Update.

DRESSED TO KILL – the climate that is. There is a connection between what is in your closet and the increased pace of global warming. In 1985 we American shoppers of all ages and both genders bought on average 31 clothing items per year. Today that rather conservative number has risen to about 60, USA= unfettered shopaholics anonymous.

The corollary to the urge to shop is the impulse to clean out the closet, and not just because the sizes change. We discard per person 78 pounds of textile a year, too much of which crowds our landfills. You know about the magic fibers that are petroleum based (and allowed us to retire the ironing board) but then there is cotton, lovely natural cotton, the fiber in about half of our clothing.

Only about 2% of worldwide farmland is devoted to cotton production but those plants require 16% of all the insecticides used. Cotton is also the thirstiest crop grown. In poor countries the infrastructure is in place for valuable cotton production for export while roads and markets are lacking for food grown for in-country use.

The problems are complicated but one solution is vintage and second-hand shopping, not merely for savings, but for fun. Another way is to feature quality rather than quantity so those treasures can become hand-me-downs. A third way to look at frugal fashion is epitomized by a story from my, and perhaps your, childhood. A proper matron from Boston was regaling her bridge group with tales from her recent trip to New York City. Among other haute couture establishments she visited Lily Dache. “Oh, did you buy a hat?” was the question to which she responded, “My dear, I have a hat!”

The Sandy-pictures of cars floating on streets in the financial district have given a nudge to our awareness of global warming. No one has ever accused the Old Dominion of rushing headlong into the next century, nor even into the present one, but somehow in this critical 21st century, being deliberately backward has lost its charm. According to the Virginia Sierra Club it is time to embrace the future and promote renewable energy. In Virginia, Dominion Power is a

regulated monopoly, in other words they call the shots. In an attempt to introduce power purchase agreements in Virginia the solar industry introduced in the 2012 General Assembly, HB 129, a bill that would have permitted renewable energy companies to sell power to their customers through Power Purchase Agreements. It passed the house easily but was stopped cold in the Senate where two members, one from each party but both beholden to Dominion Virginia Power, carried it over. It is therefore dead but will be resurrected next session as PPAs allow non-profits (colleges, local governments, charities) to lower their energy costs by working with renewable energy companies in both buying and selling back excess power.