

# Porcelain Berry: An Unwanted Beauty

Don't be fooled by the porcelain berry's attractive grape-like foliage and bright blue berries. Behind that pretty face is an invasive and aggressive weed.



Figure 1. Porcelain berry fruit. Nancy Loewenstein, Auburn University, Bugwood.org. CC BY-NC 3.0.

Porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) is a deciduous, woody, climbing vine in the grape family (Vitaceae) often found in open areas and forest edges. It spreads quickly in areas of full to partial sun and may reach lengths of 25 feet. Hardy in USDA zones 5 to 9, it is a perennial in Pennsylvania. Their dark green, heart-shaped, alternate leaves have serrated edges and vary from slightly lobed to deeply bisected. Blooming in summer, greenish-white, flat-topped clusters of flowers form in the leaf axils. Clusters of two to four seeded fruits follow the flowers. The fruits are speckled in appearance, beginning pale lilac, then turning green and maturing into a bright blue. These are eaten by birds and small mammals but are poisonous to humans.



Figure 2. Porcelain berry infestation. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org. CC BY 3.0.

Native to Japan and Northern China, porcelain berry was imported to the United States in 1870 to be used as an ornamental and landscape plant. The same characteristics that made this a desirable landscape plant for the home gardener and landscaper—low maintenance and easy to grow, and colorful berries—are the same characteristics that make it quickly invasive and difficult to eradicate. Ranked as a severe threat on Pennsylvania's invasive species list, porcelain berry can quickly spread into native plant communities, displacing the native vegetation. In ideal growing conditions, a single plant in a single growing season can reach 20 to 25 feet long. It will cling to supporting structures, such as fences, trellises, or shrubs and trees, using tendrils. Stems commonly twine around each other, as do the supporting structures. Plants will climb up and over other vegetation, blocking access to light. If it is allowed to grow on trees and shrubs, it can shade out younger plants and leave older growth more vulnerable to storm damage.



Figure 3. (Left) Porcelain berry bark. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org. CC BY 3.0 and (Right) Grape bark peels and shreds. Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org. CC BY-NC 3.0.

As with all invasive plants, quick, accurate identification is key so you can act quickly while the population is small and easier to control. It is similar in appearance to native wild grape species ( *Vitis* spp.). The fruits of the wild grape are uniformly dark purple to black when ripe, while porcelain berries are bright blue. The best way to distinguish them is by the center part of the stem or pith and the outer bark. Porcelain berry's pith is white, whereas wild grape's is brown. The bark of the wild grape will peel and shred, while porcelain berry's will not.



Figure 4. *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* flowers by A. Barra on NC Extension. CC BY 3.0.

Porcelain berry is spread vegetatively and by seed. It has an extensive root system and a large taproot. The plant will resprout when the above ground portion of the plant is cut, as well as from any pieces of root left in the soil. It is easily spread through seeds. Its seeds are eaten by birds and other small animals, and through their droppings, they are dispersed in other areas. Seeds may remain viable for several years, so preventing flowering and fruiting is important to reduce their spread. Porcelain berry plants flower on new growth, so hand-pulling in the spring can help control them. Remove larger vines with a shovel. If the plant is allowed to produce fruit, try to remove them before they have a chance to mature. Be sure to dispose of any fruits in the garbage rather than in a rubbish or compost pile. Chemical controls may be needed in large areas of infestation. Penn State Extension provides a [resource for the management of invasive plants](#) that is extremely helpful.

Unfortunately, porcelain berry plants can still be purchased at some nurseries. If you are looking for an attractive vine, consider a native alternative such as red honeysuckle ( *Lonicera dioica* ) or Virginia creeper ( *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* ). These are low-maintenance, easy-to-grow vines with colorful fruit. Additionally, there is American bittersweet ( *Celastrus scandens* ), which is also a native alternative to the invasive oriental bittersweet ( *Celastrus orbiculata* ). An easy way to distinguish between the two during the growing season is the leaves—American bittersweet has pointed leaves versus the rounded tip of oriental bittersweet leaves. Note that even the native vines can be aggressive. Proper planning is a must.

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