



Common Name: ALABAMA MILKVINE

Scientific Name: *Matelea alabamensis* (Vail) Woodson

Other Commonly Used Names: Alabama spiny-pod

Previously Used Scientific Names: *Vincetoxicum alabamense* Vail, *Cyclodon alabamense* (Vail) Small

Family: Asclepiadaceae (milkweed) or Apocynaceae (dogbane)

Rarity Ranks: G2/S1

State Legal Status: Threatened

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: UPL

Description: Perennial **vine** with non-woody, twining **stems** up to 6 feet (2 meters) long. **Leaves** up to 6 inches (15 cm) long and 4¾ inches (12 cm) wide, opposite, heart-shaped; leaf stalks 1 - 2 inches (3 - 5 cm) long. **Flower** up to 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide, with 5 pale green petals marked with a network of darker green veins. At the center of the flower, a fleshy, yellow disk (**corona**) surrounds the base of the **column**; the top of the column has a green star pattern. **Fruit**

a spiny, yellow-green pod up to 4 inches (10 cm) long. **Seeds** flat with tufts of white hairs at their tips. All parts of the plant have **milky sap**.

Similar Species: Angle-pod (*Matelea gonocarpus*, synonym: *Gonolobus suberosus*) has similar leaves but yellow, green, or brown flowers without a network of veins; its pod is smooth and angled, without wings or spines. Flowers are required to identify any milkvine species.

Related Rare Species: Yellow milkvine (*Matelea flavidula*) flowers are also green with a network of veins, but its column lacks the star pattern. Florida spiny pod (*M. floridana*) has dark maroon flowers. Both occur in moist forests in the Coastal Plain, and both are on Georgia's Plant Watch List. Also see trailing milkvine (*M. pubiflora*) in this guide.

Habitat: Sunny openings in pine-hardwood forests on bluffs and upper ravine slopes, and in open transition zones between slopes and longleaf pine sandhills.

Life History: Alabama milkvine is a perennial vine that reproduces sexually. Its flowers are pollinated by small flies which visit the flowers to obtain nectar; flowers must be cross-pollinated to set fruit and produce seed. Flowers remain open for 5 - 6 days. When a fly inserts its proboscis into a flower, a packet of pollen may stick to the underside of the proboscis; the packet may then be transferred to a flower on the next plant the fly visits, although this actually happens fairly infrequently. Alabama milkvine fruits mature in late summer and fall when they split open to release hundreds of tufted seeds that are dispersed by the wind.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (April–June, peaking in mid-May); flowers are required for identification.

Range: Georgia, Florida Panhandle, and southeast Alabama.

Threats: Clearing and conversion of habitat to pine plantations and developments. Fire suppression in adjacent pinelands. Invasion by exotic pest plants such as kudzu and Japanese honeysuckle.

Georgia Conservation Status: Seven populations of Alabama spiny pod are known, 2 in a state park, the rest on private timber lands.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Protect hardwood slope forests from clearcutting, erosion, and conversion to pine plantations. Allow prescribed fires in uplands to burn into upper edges of slope forests. Eradicate exotic pest plant species such as kudzu and Japanese honeysuckle.

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Matelea alabamensis

