

# Tropical Soda Apple

Since it was first spotted in south Florida in the late 1980s, Tropical Soda Apple (*Solanum viarum* Dunal) has steadily moved across Florida and now is making inroads into Georgia, the Carolinas, Alabama, Texas and most other southeastern states. Its highly invasive nature earned it a spot on the Federal Noxious Weed List in 1995, and in just two decades, has resulted in the plant inhabiting all counties throughout the entire state of Florida. Infestations affect cattle ranchers, hay producers and grass seed harvesters. Tropical Soda Apple also serves as a host plant for foreign plant viruses that can destroy vegetable crops such as tomatoes.

Tropical Soda Apple grows up to six feet tall, has thick foliage and is armed with thorny spikes, which together create an imposing, impenetrable barrier. Seeds are dispersed when cattle and other animals feed on its fruit.

“Tropical Soda Apple leaves behind millions of dollars of damage in lost forage production, hay or sod production, and just one Tropical Soda Apple seed found among harvested grass seed condemns the entire crop,” says Weed Science Society of America member Jeffrey Mullahey, who is Professor and Director of the West Florida Research and Education Center at the University of Florida. “And cattle ranchers must hold cattle for at least six days before transporting them out of state to prevent the spread of Tropical Soda Apple seeds.”

From January 8, 2008, *Weed Science Society of America, Invasive Plant Spotlight.*



Top – plant, showing fruit & leaves with spines; left – leaf close up, showing spines; right – ripe fruit

PHOTOS BY JEFFREY T. HUTCHINSON

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