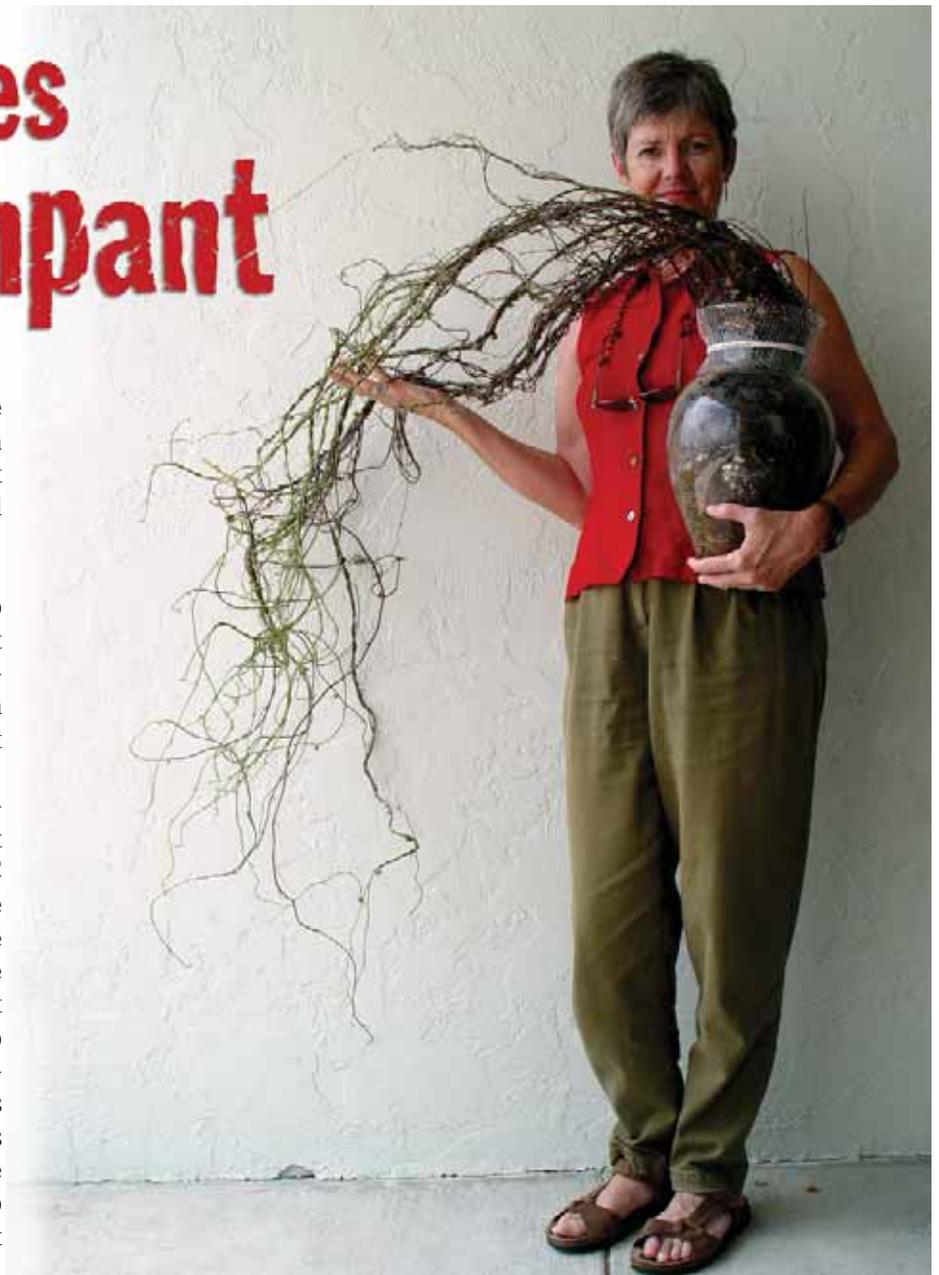


# Air Potatoes Run Rampant

by Karen Brown

What started as a fun way to gain the attention of festival-goers at a spring garden event turned into an experiment to see just how far these amazing air potatoes would grow without soil, water, or direct sunlight. 236 air potato bulbils (*Dioscorea bulbifera*) were counted into a glass vase as a contest to see who could guess the correct number. It was a popular contest with 83 people participating and a grand prize of a Florida native tree. The event took place on the first day of spring, March 20th, in Gainesville, Florida. Since the vase full of potatoes generated a lot of lively discussion, the contest was repeated at the SE-EPPC/FLEPPC Symposium in late April, using the same batch of bulbils that had been left in the same vase. Following that event, they were left on a filing cabinet under fluorescent office lights until August 2nd, still with no water or soil added. By the end of the experiment, vines were growing into notebooks on a ceiling-level bookshelf and tiny bulbils were forming along the vines. Below are photographs arranged in a time sequence to show the prolific growth of this exotic pest plant. *Photos by Michael Meisenburg.*



## Tracking the growth of *Dioscorea bulbifera*



March 20, 2004



April 23, 2004



May 13, 2004



May 28, 2004



June 23, 2004



August 2, 2004