

INVASIVE PLANT: Kebeas (*Merremia peltata*)



DESCRIPTION: A very fast growing vine which twines around stems and leaves of plants. The leaves are heart shaped, and are produced alternately on the stem. The leaves can be as large as 1 foot across. The flowers are trumpet or bell-shaped; the color ranges from yellow through cream to white. The flowers are produced in clusters, generally high above the ground. The seeds are hard, and can apparently survive for several years in the soil, until conditions are favorable for the growth of the plant. Kebeas grows from seeds, but it can also grow from small pieces of vine, and vines will regrow when cut. It is most common along roadsides at the edges of forests, or where forests are cleared.

THREAT: Kebeas can completely cover trees, smothering and killing large areas of native forest. The death of trees can result in less food for native birds and fruit bats. Loss of forest can also increase soil erosion, leading to increased sedimentation and death of coral reefs.

CURRENT STATUS: Kebeas is rapidly becoming the worst weed problem along roadsides in Koror and Babeldaob, covering increasingly large areas of native forest. It can also overtake forestry and banana plantations. As we build more roads and clear more forest, the problem will get worse, unless preventive and control measures are undertaken by local communities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Sharpen your machete! Cutting kebeas vines at the base will kill the tops and allow trees to recover. The vines will re-grow from the base, so it is best to uproot them if possible, but repeated cutting will kill the vines. Work together with your community to clear large infestations. Kebeas seeds will not germinate in the shade, so the best way to prevent kebeas problems is to keep native forest intact. For further information, contact Joseph Tiobech, the Invasive Weeds Eradication Officer, at the Bureau of Agriculture, telephone number 544-5804 or Joel Miles at the Office of Environmental Response and Coordination, 488-8681.

