

HOW TO GROW KUDZU

by Tifton B. Merritt

All you beginning gardeners out there might want to consider growing kudzu as a fine way to launch out into the great adventure of gardening. Kudzu, for those of you not already familiar with it, is a hardy perennial that can be grown quite well by the beginner who observes these few simple rules.

CHOOSING A PLOT: Kudzu can be grown almost anywhere, so site selection is not the problem it is with some other finicky plants like strawberries. Although kudzu will grow quite well on cement, for best results you should select an area having at least some dirt. To avoid lawsuits, it is advisable to plant well away from your neighbor's house, unless, of course, you don't get along well with your neighbor anyway.

PREPARING THE SOIL: Go out and stomp on the soil for a while just to get its attention and to prepare it for kudzu.

DECIDING WHEN TO PLANT: Kudzu should always be planted at night. If kudzu is planted during daylight hours, angry neighbors might see you and begin throwing rocks at you.

SELECTING THE PROPER FERTILIZER: The best fertilizer I have discovered for kudzu is 40 weight non-detergent motor oil. Kudzu actually doesn't need anything to help it grow, but the motor oil helps to prevent scraping the underside of the tender leaves then the kudzu starts its rapid growth. It also cuts down on friction and lessens the danger of fire when the kudzu really starts to move. Change oil once every thousand feet or every two weeks, whichever comes first.

MULCHING THE PLANTS: Contrary to what you may be told by the Extension Service, kudzu can profit from a good mulch. I have found that a heavy mulch for the young plants produces a hardier crop. For best results, as soon as the young shoots begin to appear, cover kudzu with concrete blocks. Although this causes a temporary setback, your kudzu will accept this mulch as a challenge and will reward you with redoubled determination in the long run.

ORGANIC OR CHEMICAL GARDENING: Kudzu is ideal for either the organic gardener or for those who prefer to use chemicals to ward off garden pests. Kudzu is oblivious to both chemicals and pests. Therefore, you can grow organically and let the pests get out of the way of the kudzu as best they can, or you can spray any commercial poison directly onto your crop. Your decision depends on how much you personally enjoy killing bugs. The kudzu will not be affected either way.

CROP ROTATION: Many gardeners are understandably concerned that growing the same crop year after year will deplete the soil. If you desire to change from kudzu to some other plant next year, now is the time to begin preparations. Right now, before the growing season has reached its peak, you should list your house and lot with a reputable real estate agent and begin making plans to move elsewhere. Your chances of selling will be better now than they will be later in the year, when it may be difficult for prospective buyer to realize that beneath those lush, green vines stands an adorable three-bedroom house.