

# Invasive plant potential threat to Canadian landscape

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It might sound like something out of a 1950s B-movie but the potential proliferation of the native Asian tropical plant kudzu here in Canada is no imaginary threat, warns Professor Rowan Sage of ecology and evolutionary biology. His research suggests that the landscape-altering invader, once dubbed “the plant that ate the South” for its ability to kill trees and other plants by overtopping and shading them, may be headed this way.

Sage and his team are looking at climate controls on this invasive woody vine that currently covers over three million hectares in the U.S. and that after more than 100 years of having a stable northern limit is now migrating north.

Heather Coiner, one of the researchers on the kudzu project, hypothesizes that warming winter temperatures are responsible for kudzu’s recent invasions into the Midwestern U.S. and predicts that if warming trends continue, kudzu should be able to survive as far north as Canada in as little as 10 to 15 years.

This month the Sage lab was awarded a special “accelerator” grant from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, a funding top-up aimed at researchers deemed to be “on the verge of a breakthrough.” Future research will see tests developed to predict the movement of kudzu used to predict the range movements of other plants.

“It’s important to note that the Canadian government does not

specifically regulate kudzu and it continues to be available for purchase from Canadian companies,” Sage said. “Our hope is that this research will be seen as an opportunity for the federal government to protect Canadian ecosystems and farms by pre-empting the possible invasion of Canada by this unwanted species.”

Source: University of Toronto

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