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# Laurel-leaved Greenbrier, Bamboo Smilax laurifolia L.

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# Technical Report



## Wetland Flora

No. 01-1 / January 2001

Gene Silberhorn

### Laurel-leaved Greenbrier

### Bamboo

*Smilax laurifolia* L.

#### Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

*Smilax laurifolia* is a high climbing, alternate leaved, evergreen vine most often found in wet woods and swamps. Leaves are oblong to linear in shape. The sometimes thorny vine has tendrils that coil around tree branches, often far up into the canopy. The sweet smelling, tiny yellowish-green flowers are seldom noticed except when blooming near the ground in bushes or lower tree branches. The common name 'bamboo' is often used in the Carolinas and Georgia. The author has not researched the southern origin of this name. Comments are welcomed. Black, fleshy, round, berries ripen the second year after going through a green stage. Another, somewhat evergreen, greenbrier that often occurs in swamps is *S. walteri*. The species, however, has thinner leaves, cordate or triangular in shape and bright red berries. Another vine, cross vine (*Anisostichus capreolata*), also a high climber, with twin, paired, usually evergreen leaflets may also be found in wooded wetlands. However, cross vine is thornless and the leaflets opposite, not alternate and it does not produce black berries.

#### Distribution

Laurel-leaved greenbrier is a southeastern species and ranges from Virginia along the Atlantic Coast to Florida and along the Gulf Coast to Alabama.

#### Habitat

*Smilax laurifolia*, in Virginia, is found in forested wetlands where the soil remains saturated most of the year. It is not unusual to find this climbing vine in maritime swamps, bays and pocosins. It is particularly common in the Dismal Swamp and the Northwest River Watershed. In addition to trees, it often grows in dense profusion in tall shrubs such as wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*).

#### Ecological Value/Benefits

Greenbriers, in general, provide cover for small animals. The berries are eaten extensively by mockingbirds, catbirds and fish crows. Deer browse on the young tender shoots in spring.

#### Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Revision of the National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Smilax laurifolia* is classified as an **obligate wetland plant (OBL)**. OBLs are plants that almost always occur in wetlands (>99% probability).

## *Smilax laurifolia* L.

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