

A Story With A Twist

Parsonsia straminea – Common Silkpod

By Julie Mousley

Parsonsia straminea is a widespread and common, woody vine found in most types of rainforest and sclerophyll forest on the North Coast. Its range also includes the Northern and Southern Tablelands, Central Coast, Central Western Slopes & QLD. In Australia there are 22 species of *Parsonsia* (20 endemic) and they're also found throughout the Asia Pacific countries.

Common Silkpod is usually found climbing on trunks and branches of trees with the aid of adventitious roots. It can also be seen as a twiner (no adventitious roots). The fruit is an elongated, pod-like capsule, from which numerous seeds with a coma of *long silky hairs* are dispersed.

The twining and twisting stems of the Common Silkpod can be found growing in association with mature rainforest trees. The vine stems can become very thick and strong with lichen growing on the vines, as they get older.

Parsonsia is a tough plant.

In a situation where the forest ecosystem has been degraded or disturbed, there may be competition from more than one vine, especially when there are just a few sapling trees to climb on to. This scenario commonly occurs on the edge of disturbed forests and riparian zones. It's wise to seek management advice and correct identification of vine and tree species before taking any action to control vines. Vine thickets can also be considered as a successional stage in the recovery potential of a degraded forest system or occur simply because there is a natural opportunity within an ecosystem for vines to take up that space. Many small birds love the protection and habitat of a healthy vine thicket.



Over the past year I've observed *Parsonsia* exhibiting an interesting and useful behaviour on the banks of tidal channels, which are often devoid of any other native vegetation. With no trees to climb on, the vine is growing lengthways and down the bank. It seems to create an effective natural barrier, preventing some of the erosion from wave action and tidal movement and assisting bank stability. There is however, no substitute for a good mix of native tree, grass and shrub species on riparian zones for bank stability and habitat for birds, animals and fish.

And here's the twist... on a recent visit to the upper Coldstream River with Roy Bowling who is a wealth of knowledge about the history of the Clarence floodplain and always manages to capture my attention with his stories of bush folk lore and trees, Roy pointed out a useful characteristic of the Common Silkpod - how to find North. Find where the vine (it needs to be fairly old) comes out of the ground and starts its journey around the tree trunk. The vine is always turning towards North...so find a *full* turn of the vine around the tree trunk and half way between the full turn is due north. Next time the batteries on my GPS run out (which happens often), I'll be looking for 'vine north'.

Although we have our fair share of invasive introduced vines around the Clarence and all over the North Coast, not all vines are weeds and it is wise to properly identify them and assess the situation before removing them.

