



My Green Air-conditioner

Here we are coming into hot summer - finally! I have written before about how my home doesn't have many 'modern conveniences'; I have neither heating system for winter, nor cooling system for summer. But although that is true - there are no such electrical appliances here - I do have an air conditioner ... of sorts!

My home faces south, and thus catches plenty of sun most days. In the middle of winter this building becomes a bit shaded by the one across the street, but in summer when the sun is high in the sky, nothing blocks the sunlight, and the room on the south side becomes very hot indeed. That is my sort of living room, and even when I open the windows to let in a breeze, it is still very hot in there.

Because I don't want to live in a chilled environment such as we get from using an air conditioner, for the first couple of years I lived here I just put up with this; I didn't really see any alternative. But starting about three years ago, a very natural solution to the problem started to just 'grow' on me ...

There is a strip of land about one meter wide between the front of the house and the street. A maple tree that was there when I moved in died a few years ago; I think the soil is not so good, and it was also under constant attack from ants, who seemed to be using it as an aphid farm. After it was gone, other plants started to grow in its place, and among these was the one known as Bushkiller, or Sorrel Weed; the Japanese name is 'Yabugarashi'.

Now any gardeners who hear that, instantly understand the situation I am faced with, and they know why I no longer have a problem with the south side of my home becoming too hot! This plant is a vine; it climbs ... and it climbs ... and it climbs some more! Each year, dozens of shoots spring up from the soil in May and start to stretch upwards. If they find a support, they climb straight up as far as they can, but even where there is no support, they manage to stick to the wall as they grow higher and higher.

The first year it showed up it became a huge tangled mess, and I had to slash it away bit by bit to be able to even get in and out through the sliding door on that wall. But these days I am ready for it, and know what to do. When I see it start to sprout, I prepare a number of strings stretching from the second floor down into the garden area. The vines of course eagerly grab onto these, and follow the route I have planned. I trim away vines that don't follow the rest, and by mid-summer my natural air-conditioner curtain is in place, complete with a pathway to walk underneath!

It makes a tremendous difference in the temperature of the room; I of course keep the windows open for a breeze as well, and the combination of the two makes for a very comfortable environment.

I think though, that some of my neighbours may not be too happy about this. I did a bit of research on the internet about this plant, and found that it is listed on the 'Red Alert' page of a website devoted to 'Invasive Weeds' in the US. The description says that the name 'Bushkiller' came because it grows so aggressively that its weight can collapse the tree on which it climbs.

Hmm ... now I'm getting a bit nervous ... this house isn't all that strong, you know!