**The Superbug-Fighting Weed**

**An invasive-shrub known as the Brazilian peppertree could be a new weapon in the fight against antibiotic-resistant superbugs, reports WashingtonPost.com. A relative of poison ivy indigenous to South America, the Brazilian peppertree is the scourge of homeowners across the southern U.S., Florida in particular. But traditional healers in the Amazon have been using its bright red berries to treat skin infections for centuries, and researchers from the University of Iowa and Emory University believe the plant may contain a substance that effectively neutralizes methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). The team infected mice with the bacteria and treated some of them with Brazilian peppertree extract. While the untreated mice developed skin lesions, those who were given the plant compound did not. "It essentially disarms the MRSA bacteria, preventing it from excreting the toxins it uses as weapons to damage tissues," explains Cassandra Quave, an ethno-botanist at Emory. "The body's normal immune system then stands a better chance of healing a wound." The findings could lead to new ways of controlling antibiotic resistance and treating MRSA infections, which claimed 11,000 lives in the U.S. in 2011. *(The Week magazine, March 3, 2017)***