

Invasive Plants

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Invasive Plants, by definition, are plant species that are non-native to an eco-system and whose introduction causes or may cause harm to the economy, environment or human health. They have been introduced either accidentally or intentionally. They either displace or replace native plants.

Some invasive plants were brought here as ornamental plants, including Japanese barberry, common tansy, purple loosestrife, Eurasian bush honeysuckles, Oriental bittersweet, and wild chervil. Because these plants come from foreign lands and do not have the natural controls that native plants have, they soon take over the garden. They are then spread by the wind, birds, or deep-set runners to grasslands, forests, and waterways.

Some invasive species were brought here for food, such as garlic mustard and wild parsnip. Garlic mustard was brought to North America in the 1800's as an edible herb that is high in vitamins A and C. The seeds are easily spread by animals and humans. The seeds can live 6-10 years. Stands of garlic mustard can double every four years. Once established, it displaces native flowers, such as trilliums and trout lilies. It also threatens several species of native flowers, including nodding trillium and white wood aster.

Wild parsnip was introduced as a garden food crop and is in the carrot family. It poses a health hazard that some people may not be aware of. It causes a condition called "phytophotodermatitis" when skin touches the plant. After exposure, skin will blister and weep when exposed to the sun. In severe cases, there is a burning and scalding type pain. The condition can last for several months and possibly as much as two years.

Invasive plants can attract or be host plants for butterflies. Wild parsnip is the host plant for the Black Swallowtail caterpillar. Painted lady butterflies are attracted to thistles. However, when planning a butterfly garden, use species native to your area and avoid invasive plants such as Dame's rocket, Queen Anne's lace, honeysuckles, and thistles.

Some invasive plants are poisonous. Leafy spurge can cause blistering to the mouth or throat of animals. This poisonous plant has laxative properties. All parts of Poison hemlock plant are toxic to animals and humans if ingested. Porcelain berries have a low toxicity if eaten. Therefore, do not eat the berries.

Some invasive plants have been used for herbal or folk remedies. Common tansy was used, with poor results, because the plant contains a toxic oil called tanacetum. Grecian Foxglove (*Digitalis lanata*) was one of the herbal remedies used by the ancient Romans. All parts of the plant are toxic. Ingestion of even small amounts may be fatal to humans, and the toxicity is cumulative.



Foxglove

Many invasive plants are ecological threats. An example of this is the common buckthorn, which may alter the nitrogen level and may cause the elimination of leaf litter. Another example is wild chervil, which invades fields and pastures, shading out surrounding vegetation. It is host to yellow fleck virus, which infests carrots, celery, and parsnips.

If we all do our part, we can minimize the harmful impacts of invasive species. Plant native species, carefully control and remove invasive species from your property, volunteer with other organizations that control invasive plants, and provide information to others about the impact of invasive plants on health, economic loss, and ecological impact.