

# Invasive Plants

## Fact Sheet

### What is an invasive plant?

An invasive plant can be a tree, shrub, grass, herb, or fern in water or on land that is not native to a region or country and causes harm to the economy, environment, or human health in areas where it becomes established. Not all plants from other countries or regions are harmful. Only the plants that grow and reproduce rapidly that cause harmful impacts are called “invasive”- about 1% of the plants introduced to the U.S.

### Why should you care?

Invasive plants can be found on national park lands, other federal lands, state lands, and privately-owned lands, which may include your yard or garden. The **economic cost** of controlling and managing these plants in natural areas and farm fields is more than \$34 billion per year.

**Environmental impacts** are harder to measure, but they could include: 1) a decrease in the number and types of native plants in an area which then affects all the native animals that rely on native plants for food and shelter, 2) an increase in erosion, and 3) changes in nutrients in soil. For example, common buckthorn, an invasive shrub, releases a chemical into the soil that inhibits the growth of plants around it. When rain storms occur in ravines where buckthorn grows there is a lot of erosion and soil runoff into streams and rivers that flow into Lake Michigan which affects the Lake’s water quality for aquatic plants and animals.

In addition, many invasive plants affect **recreation**. Swimming, boating, and fishing are hard to do when a lake or river is clogged with dense mats of invasive plants.



Dense mat of the invasive aquatic plant Brazilian elodea (Photo taken by Ann Murray, University of Florida/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants)



Asian bittersweet, an invasive vine that is used for floral arrangements and holiday decorations. (Photo by D. Maurer)

### How are invasive plants moved around?

Many invasive plants are spread by seed, plant parts or root fragments. Many birds and small mammals eat the fruits or seeds of invasive plants and deposit them some distance from the original plant. Here are some common ways invasive plants are moved to new locations:

#### Methods of Introduction

- Boats, ATVs, automobiles, tires
- Shoe treads and laces; clothing
- Animal hooves and fur
- Souvenirs
- Packing material
- Movement of soil for construction and landscaping projects
- Planting for erosion control
- Food and medicinal purposes
- Windbreaks, wildlife habitat, and forage
- Aquaria
- Garden ornamentals

White Callery pear blossoms in spring. (Photo taken from Virginia Tech vTree website.)



## How Can You Help?

The most effective methods for dealing with invasive plants are prevention and early detection/rapid response. Everyone can help in these efforts -

**GET INFORMED** Learn to recognize and report different invasive plants in your region

**MAKE SMART CHOICES** Purchase and plant native species in your garden; replace invasive species

**REMOVE** Dirt and seeds from clothing, shoes, pets, and tires before entering public lands

**CLEAN** Boating and fishing equipment before and after use

**VOLUNTEER** Become a natural areas steward



Flowering rush is an invasive aquatic garden plant that is fairly new to the Chicago region. (Photo taken by Judziewicz)

Amur honeysuckle is an invasive shrub that is found in many natural areas in northern Illinois. (Photo taken by Chuck Barger, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org)



## Resources

### National

#### Center for Invasive Species Management

[www.weedcenter.org/resources/state.html](http://www.weedcenter.org/resources/state.html)

#### Early Detection and Distribution Mapping

<http://www.eddmaps.org/distribution/>

#### Federal Noxious Weed List

[plants.usda.gov/java/noxious](http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxious)

#### National Invasive Species Council

[www.doi.gov/NISC/index.html](http://www.doi.gov/NISC/index.html)

#### National Invasive Species Information Center

[www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/index.shtml](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/index.shtml)

### Regional and State

#### Illinois Native Plant Guide

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/il/plantsanimals/?cid=nrcs141p2\\_030715](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/il/plantsanimals/?cid=nrcs141p2_030715)

**Illinois Plant, Landscape, and Nursery Technology extension.** [illinois.edu/IPLANT/plant\\_select/native.htm](http://illinois.edu/IPLANT/plant_select/native.htm)

#### Illinois Wild Flowers (native)

[www.illinoiswildflowers.info/](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/)

#### Midwest Invasive Plant Network

[www.mipn.org](http://www.mipn.org)

#### Native Plant Use in Landscaping

[www.inhs.illinois.edu/~kenr/prairienativelinks.html](http://www.inhs.illinois.edu/~kenr/prairienativelinks.html)

#### The New Invaders Watch Program

[www.newinvaders.org](http://www.newinvaders.org)

#### The Northeast Illinois Invasive Plant Partnership

[www.niipp.net](http://www.niipp.net)