Fairfax County Stewardship

Invasive Forest Plants

Ten Forest Invaders

Japanese Honeysuckle

Photos by Don Sweeney unless otherwise noted.

How sweet the smell of honeysuckle – kind of takes you back to the barefoot days of long and lazy summers past. However, Japanese honeysuckle vines strangle our native vegetation leaving us nothing but a sticky mess.

Stiltgrass

Ever seen grass standing on stilts? Now you have. Spreading out in a uniform, bright green carpet, stiltgrass can quickly overrun the diverse native plants of the forest understory.

Asian Wisteria

Wisteria may have a pretty purple flower but we will soon grow tired of seeing it in the trees as it will continue to grow and spread for decades.

Tree of Heaven

Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.forestryimages.org

Looking like a cross between sumac and something tropical, this tree is spreading rapidly throughout the U.S. Tree of heaven prevents native plants from growing by releasing chemicals into the soil. It also has a nasty odor if you crush a leaf.

Porcelain Berry

A vine with an ornamental history – the blue berries are the prettiest around – but their fruit is for birds only. Unfortunately, the vine has a nasty habit of shading out the trees that it climbs on, causing limb breakage and unsafe conditions.

Garlic Mustard

Another one of those "carpet plants" – garlic mustard doesn't know to stay on the trail in the forest. The slight garlicky odor from the crushed leaves helps distinguish it from the native understory plants.

Chinese Lespedeza

James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, www.forestryimages.org

Lespedeza looks a bit like clover. Once established, it just doesn't go away. Seeds can live in the soil for over 55 years! Worse, this plant competes with the shrubs that birds love, so its got to go.

Mimosa or Silktree

This short-lived tree with brittle wood and the tendency to produce suckers possesses a number of undesirable traits. Unfortunately, it also spreads into natural areas, stealing space from native trees and shrubs.

Mile-a-Minute or Devil's Tear Thumb

Mile-a-minute grows very fast, searching for light and smothering everything in its way. Its other name, devil's tear thumb, gives you a clue to the nasty barbs hiding underneath the leaves that make it so hard to remove.

Norway Maple

Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.forestryimages.org

Norway maple looks like a native maple, but the milky sap that flows when you break a leaf tells you that appearances are deceiving. In some forests, this is the most common tree.

If not you, who?

- **Check out your yard** to make sure what you have growing is not going to invade the forest. Consider replacing invasive plants with species that are not aggressive.
- **Know what you are planting**. Make sure it is a native species or one that has a low probability of becoming a problem to the forest.
- **If an invasive species is noticed early enough, we can prevent further spread**. Removal before flowering often helps eradicate the species.
- **Clean your hiking shoes, pets and bikes** to prevent seeds from spreading from one trail to the next.
- **Help out your local forest** by contacting a volunteer group or land owner to seek permission and information as to how to remove an invasive species.

So What's The Big Deal?

Invasive plants can rapidly overtake the forest, pushing out native plant species, damaging wildlife habitats and endangering property.

The difference between a regular, happy-go-lucky plant and an invasive plant is that invasive plants aggressively reproduce and negatively affect the ecology of a natural area. Invasive species are generally considered to be so aggressive and so negative that action must be taken. Invasive species have three main types of effects on native species:

- fewer native plants
- less healthy wildlife
- less predictability of how a natural area is going to react to a fire, flood or management activity.

Doing nothing can be expensive. Experts agree that non-native, invasive species are the second most serious threat to the quality of natural areas and their ability to support wildlife (habitat loss is the top threat). Scientists estimate that invasive species are present in over 100 million acres of the U.S., or an area roughly the size of California, with 14 million new acres, or an area about half the size of Virginia, infested every year! Recent studies have estimated the cost of invasive species in the United States at more than $100 billion a year. Over the last 30 years, invasive species have slowly taken a firm foothold in our area.

If not you, who?

Help out with a volunteer work day in your neighborhood! You can learn a lot about how to remove invasive species from natural areas, meet new people and have fun. Learn more at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship.

Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisor's 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at **www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship**

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