

# Common Invasive Plants Threatening Our Ecosystem

## What are invasive species and why should we worry about them?

Invasive species are plants, insects, and other organisms that are not native to the United States. Many of them grow and reproduce rapidly, taking over large areas and causing major disturbances to the natural environment. This aggressive behavior creates big problems because invasives will crowd out and kill native wildflowers, trees, and shrubs. When that happens, the habitat for all the insects, birds, and mammals that lived in those areas is permanently altered. If the wildlife that depended on that habitat for food, shelter, and nesting cannot adapt to the new surroundings, they too will be displaced if they cannot survive there any more. **Be on the lookout and control infestations in your own backyards.**



**Morrow's Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera morrowii*) is a woody, perennial shrub that reaches 8 ft. in height. The stems are hollow. The oppositely arranged leaves are oblong to narrowly elliptic in shape and measure 1-2.5 in. long. The flowers appear on this plant from late May to early

June. The fruits appear mid-summer and are red spherical berries measuring 0.25 in. in diameter. Native to Japan.



**Porcelain Berry** (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) is a tendril-bearing perennial vine that can grow 10-20 ft. high. The leaves are alternate, 3- or 5-lobed and are 2-4 in. across. The young twigs and undersides of leaves are hairy. Small dense green flowers appear in July-August. Spherical fruit

appears in September and is 0.25-0.3 in. in size. They are hard berries that vary in color from yellow to lilac to green, and most often end up a sky blue. Native to Japan & China.



**Oriental Bittersweet** (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is a perennial, deciduous vine that can grow up to 60 ft. long. The stems of the vine have dark brown to brown striated bark and can reach 4 in. in diameter. The light green, widely elliptic leaves are alternate and spiral evenly around the stem. It flowers

in May to early June. The fruits, which are yellow, have a fleshy red aril surrounding them, and are produced from July to October. The vines are often used in wreaths and flower arrangements after the fruits split open because of their colorful display. Native to Japan, Korea and China.



**Glossy Buckthorn** (*Frangula alnus*) is a deciduous small tree or coarse shrub that grows up to 20 ft. tall. It is often confused with some cherry species. The short oblong leaves are 1-2.5 in. long and are arranged alternately. Clusters of yellow-green flowers appear from May to September and produce

fruit 0.25 in. across that changes from red to black, ripening in July and August. Native to Europe, N.Africa & Central Asia.



**Multiflora Rose** (*Rosa multiflora*) is a densely spreading perennial shrub that can grow up to 15 ft. tall in arching canes that can be red to green in color. Most have thorns. The leaves are alternate and pinnately compound, with 5-11 serrated, elliptic leaflets 1-1.5 in. long. The leaves are

dark and smooth above and pale with small hairs below. It produces fragrant flowers with five white petals during May & June. Red fruits develop in summer, are nearly spherical, and measure 0.25-0.3 in. in diameter. Native to Japan.



**Japanese Barberry** (*Berberis thunbergii*) is a dense deciduous shrub 2-8 ft. tall. It flowers from mid April to May and its fruits mature from July to October. The branches are deeply grooved brown with spines. The leaves are narrowly obovate in shape, and are 0.5-1.5 in. long. They

range in color from slightly bluish-green to green to dark reddish purple. Pale yellow flowers hang down along the entire length of the stem in the spring. Bright red elliptic berries 0.28-0.35 in. long appear in the fall and remain until the following spring. Native to Japan.

## Common Invasive Plants Threatening Our Ecosystem (continued)

### More information on invasive plants:

- Bringing Nature Home – A Case for Native Gardening: <http://bringingnaturehome.net/>
- Invasives.org: <http://www.invasive.org>
- Invasive Plant Atlas of New England: <http://www.eddmaps.org>
- Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group (at University of Connecticut): <http://www.cipwg.uconn.edu/>
- Maine Invasive Species Network (University of Maine Cooperative Extension): <http://umaine.edu/invasivespecies/>
- Mass Invasive Plant Advisory Group: <http://www.massnrc.org/mipag/>
- SUASCO Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area: <http://www.cisma-suasco.org/>

### Tools for identifying plants:

- New England Wildflower Society: <http://gobotany.newenglandwild.org/>
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center: <http://www.wildflower.org/>
- US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Services – Plants Database: <http://plants.usda.gov>



**Burning Bush** (*Euonymus alatus*) or winged spindletree, grows as a deciduous shrub up to 12 feet tall. Corky ridges form along the green twigs, and give the branches a winged appearance. The leaves are opposite and are elliptical in shape with toothed margins, and turn a brilliant

scarlet in the fall. Inconspicuous greenish flowers occur in late spring, and red-purple fruits mature during summer. Native to northeastern Asia.



**Japanese Knotweed** (*Fallopia japonica*) is a tall herbaceous perennial that grows to 10 feet in height. The stems are smooth, stout and swollen at joints where the leaf meets the stem and the base of the stem above each joint is surrounded by a membranous sheath. Leaves are 6 inches long

by 3-4 in. wide, broadly oval to somewhat triangular and pointed at the tip. Minute, greenish-white flowers occur in branched sprays in summer developing into small winged fruits. Seeds are triangular, shiny, and small, 1/10 inch long.



**Autumn Olive** (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) is a deciduous shrub that can grow to 20 ft. in height. The stems, buds and leaves have a dense covering of silvery to rusty scales. Leaves are alternate, egg or lance-shaped, smooth margined, dull green above and often with brown scales beneath.

It flowers in June and July. The densely clustered blossoms are aromatic, pale yellow, and fused at the base with 4 petals pointed at the tips. Small, red-brown to pink fruit dotted with brown or silvery scales is produced in August through October. Native to China and Japan.



**Purple Loosestrife** (*Lythraceae salicaria*) is an erect perennial herb in the loosestrife family, with a square, woody stem and opposite or whorled leaves. Leaves are lance-shaped, stalkless, and heart-shaped or rounded at the base. Loosestrife plants grow from four to ten feet high, depending

upon conditions, and produce a showy display of magenta-colored flower spikes throughout much of the summer. Flowers have five to seven petals.



**Garlic Mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*) is a cool season biennial herb with stalked, triangular to heart-shaped, coarsely toothed leaves that give off an odor of garlic when crushed. First-year plants appear as a rosette of green leaves close to the ground. Rosettes remain green through

the winter and develop into mature flowering plants the following spring. Flowering plants reach from 2 to 3.5 feet in height and produce button-like clusters of small white flowers, each with four petals in the shape of a cross.



**Black Swallowwort** (*Cynanchum louiseae*) is a perennial, twining herbaceous vine. The leaves are oval, with pointed tips, 3-4 in. long by 2-3 in. wide, and occur in pairs along the stem. The clustered small five-petaled star-shaped flowers are dark purple to almost black with white hairs,

about 1/4 in. across. The fruits are slender tapered pods, 2-3 in. long by 1/4 in. wide, turning from green to light brown. Rhizomes sprout new plants and grow in clumps which form broad patches. Monarch butterflies lay their eggs on this plant, but the larvae will not survive. Native to Europe.