

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## WHAT'S A CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION DOING KILLING PLANTS?

*Alien plants*, also known as exotic or non-native plants, are species introduced by human activity into a region in which they did not evolve. Our aliens come from all over the globe: Europe, Asia and Africa. Many were brought here for cultivation and others arrived in animal fodder or on animals themselves that came over on ships. While most alien species are economically important and not a problem, a small percentage become invasive.

*Invasive alien plants* become agricultural pests, infest lawns as weeds, displace native plant species, reduce wildlife habitat, and alter ecosystem processes. Across the country and around the world, invasive alien plants and animals have become one of the most serious

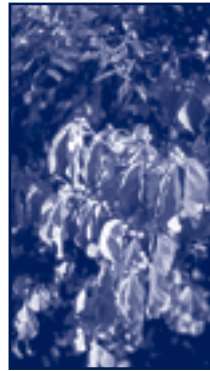


*Multiflora Rose*

John M. Randall / The Nature Conservancy

threats to native species, natural communities, and ecosystem processes. They also exact a costly toll from human economies that depend on resources and services provided by healthy ecosystems.

*The Top Invaders of SVT reservations* are Oriental bittersweet, a climbing vine, and glossy and common buckthorn shrubs. Others include multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife, various species of honeysuckle, and Norway



*Bittersweet*

John M. Randall / The Nature Conservancy

maple. Many of these invaders are most common on former agricultural lands. That's because invaders thrive on disturbed soils.

Bittersweet and buckthorn spread quickly because birds eat and disperse their seeds.

Both plants will come back with a vengeance after being cut unless treated with an herbicide. Bittersweet often persists even after herbicide application and requires repeated treatments.

Oriental bittersweet literally strangles out the forest. It winds its way up trees and shrubs. As it grows, it constricts the host

tree, cutting off its vital fluids. And at the same time the bittersweet leaves shade the tree, limiting photosynthesis.

Bittersweet tangles severely reduce the biodiversity in our natural areas by killing off and dramatically reducing native plant populations.

Glossy and common buckthorn are persistent shrubs that are adaptable to variable soil conditions. They can take over the understory of a small woodlot or an entire field. They are less frequent in large forests where the common fruit-eating birds do not roam and dense shade inhibits seed production.



*Buckthorn*

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*Loosestrife*

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## How You Can Help:

1. Avoid disturbance to natural areas, including clearing of native vegetation, planting of non-native plants and dumping of yard wastes.
2. Do not purchase or use invasive exotic species in your landscaping or for land restoration or erosion control projects.
3. For landscaping, use plants that are native to your local region as much as possible or those that are not known to be invasive. When using alien plants, avoid highly invasive species.
4. Discuss your concerns about invasive exotic plants with nurseries and garden shops and ask them not to sell these species. Ask for non-invading alternatives instead.
5. Work with your local government and local businesses to encourage the use of native plants in their urban and suburban landscapes. Provide them with lists of attractive, non-invasive locally native alternatives that are naturally more hardy, pest-resistant, and provide more nutritious food for wildlife than cultivated plants.
6. Support public policies that restrict the introduction of invasive alien plants and get involved in organizations that work to protect biodiversity.
7. Offer to assist in exotic plant control projects.

Call Laura Mattei, Stewardship Director at 978-897-5500, ext.34.

Sources: Material for this article was obtained from New England Wildflower Society ([www.newfs.org](http://www.newfs.org)), Invasive Alien Plant Cooperative Project of Virginia ([www.dcr.state.va.us/dnh/invproj/](http://www.dcr.state.va.us/dnh/invproj/)), and the Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group ([www.nps.gov/plants/alien](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien)).