

Forest Health



Dealing with Nonnative Invasive Plants in Your Woodland

by Billy Thomas

Your woodlands are changing. This has been and always will be the case because woodlands are dynamic ecosystems with different plants coming and going over the years. While this change may be difficult for us to notice sometimes, it is still occurring. However, the rate of change is being sped up by nonnative invasive plants as they become more prevalent across the state. These plants displace and out-compete native plants oftentimes forming dense monocultures that degrade the value of the property. If you are not dealing with nonnative invasive plant problems on your property, you likely will be in the future. This article covers steps that woodland owners can take to address nonnative invasive plants on their properties and highlights resources available to assist.

Steps to Dealing with Nonnative Invasive Plants in Your Woodland

Nonnative invasive plants will be an ongoing issue that woodland owners will be forced to address. With the right mix of information, vigilance, and dedication, woodland owners will have a better chance of combatting nonnative invasive plants on their property. Regardless of whether you are dealing with nonnative invasive plant problems now or you have yet to discover them on your property, the following steps will help you meet the challenge they pose.

Early Detection

The sooner the presence of nonnative invasive plants can be detected the better. It is much easier to treat a few plants before they spread, requiring a larger response. Make a point to observe the plants on your property with an eye out for anything that appears new or different. Many times nonnative invasive plants will grab a toehold along property boundaries, fence lines, roads, trails, or areas that recently have been disturbed, so these areas should receive extra scrutiny. Vary the times of year you go on your scouting trips as the various seasons can reveal characteristics of nonnative invasive plants that may be harder to see the rest of the year. Many of the nonnative invasive plants will leaf out earlier and retain their leaves longer than our native plants. Also, don't forget to look for plants that have escaped yours or a neighbor's yard; ornamental plants such as bush honeysuckle, privet, burning bush, Callery pears, and Chinese silver grass are quickly escaping into natural areas and are a serious threat—even if you are used to seeing them in residential areas.



Photo courtesy:
Steven Katovich,
USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Right photo courtesy: Chris Evans,
Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, Bugwood.org

Finding and treating nonnative invasive plants before they can set seed will make controlling them much easier. Garlic mustard above is a biennial that spends its first year as a low rosette but in its second year it grows to approximately three feet in height and is capable of producing over 7,000 seeds per plant that can remain viable for five years!



Addressing nonnative invasive plants before they dominate your woodland like those in the photo above will save you a great deal of work and expense.

Identification

Once you think you have discovered a nonnative invasive plant on your property, the next step is to learn its identity. Many nonnative invasive plants will have characteristics that stand out from our native plants but some have a close resemblance to native plants. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service has developed an outstanding publication



The flowers, large leaves, and seed capsules of paulownia are characteristics that aid in identification.

Photo courtesy: Songlin Fei

Photo courtesy: James R. Allison, Georgia
Department of Natural Resources, Bugwood.org

titled *A Field Guide for the Identification of Invasive Plants in Southern Forests* available at www.srs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr_srs119.pdf. Also available is a companion management guide, and both are combined into an iTunes application that is available free at <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/invasive-plants-in-southern/id495852751?mt=8>. Another option is to take the plant or a sample of it to your local county Extension agent; if they do not know what the plant is, they can send it to the University of Kentucky for identification.

Appropriate Control

Selecting and using the right tool for the job will save you money, time, and frustration. There are multiple ways to treat these invaders depending on the type of nonnative invasive plant, their development stage, density, and location. The two methods that are most often used by woodland owners are manual and herbicides or a combination of the two. Manual treatments include: pulling, mowing, cutting, and girdling to name a few. These manual methods can be labor intensive and vary greatly in their effectiveness—one benefit of this method is that it typically involves readily available tools and can limit non-target damage working well in sensitive areas. The herbicide method is the most widely used method to control



the tree-of-heaven leaves are not toothed and have a foul smell when they are bruised.



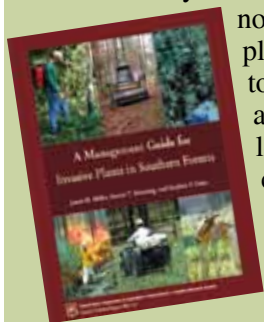
Photos courtesy: Paul Wray, Iowa State University, Bugwood.org

Tree-of-heaven (left) and staghorn sumac (above) may have similar leaves but they are certainly not the same plant. Tree-of-heaven is a serious problem in many woodlands. Staghorn sumac has toothed leaflets and red hairy stems while



Photo courtesy: Renee Williams

The appropriate use of herbicides is often required to adequately control nonnative invasive plants. Remember to always follow the label when using herbicides.



non-native invasive plants. When using herbicides, it is critical to match the right product with the plant, applying it in the appropriate way, and following all label directions. All the details can be found in *A Management Guide for Invasive Plants in Southern Forests* by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, available at www.srs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr_srs131.pdf.

Follow-up

Some nonnative invasive plants are easier to control than others. Unfortunately, you typically cannot treat them once and walk away. Inevitably, you might have missed a few plants or there could have been something that did not go just right during the first control attempt that will require a retreatment. The good news is that these follow-up control treatments are often just spot treatments here and there as opposed to a complete redo. If you are going to go through the effort of trying to control them in the first place, then it is worth it to go ahead and do the follow-up as needed. Make sure to visit the treated areas in subsequent growing seasons to make sure the situation stays under control.

Ongoing Woodland Management Strategies

Consider how management decisions can create potential nonnative invasive plant problems. For example, prior to timber harvesting or implementing practices that open up the canopy and cause more light to reach the forest floor, make sure to treat any invasive plants in the area that could thrive once they are released. You may have a neighbor who has invasive plants on their property that are seeding in onto yours. They are likely not aware there is an issue. A friendly discussion or offering to help them control it on their property may help your control efforts.

Steps discussed in this article can help you to successfully meet the challenge that nonnative invasive plants pose to your woodland. In addition to the resources mentioned previously, there are numerous other sources of assistance to help you deal with nonnative invasive plants on your property. Working with a professional forester or other natural resource professional is highly recommended as their knowledge and technical expertise will be invaluable as you manage your woodlands. They may also be able to direct you to financial assistance that is available from time to time to control nonnative invasive plants. Additional information can be found at the Web sites listed below. Start scouting your woodlands now as the best time to control a nonnative invasive plant infestation is before it starts or gets out of hand.

Online Resources:

- www.invasive.org
- www.ca.uky.edu/forestryextension/publications_foresthealth.php
- www.fws.gov/invasives/staffTrainingModule/index.html

- www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/index.shtml
- www.se-eppc.org/ky/

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