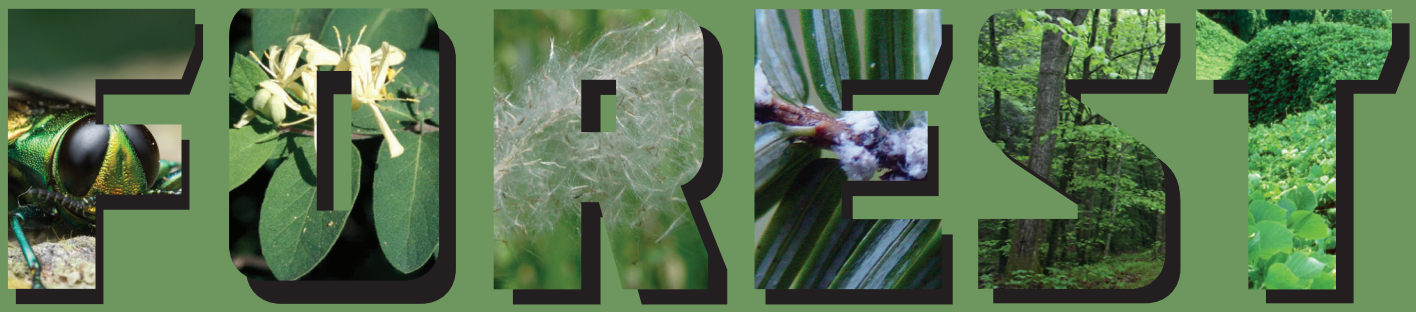


*New*Invasive Plants to Watch For

by Ellen Crocker and David Taylor

Invasive plants are a threat to the health of woodlands throughout Kentucky and can interfere with your management goals. The term "invasive plant" refers to those that are non-native (introduced from some other part of the world) and which cause economic or ecological problems. These unwelcomed plants can rapidly take advantage of disturbances like harvests or the loss of trees due to emerald ash borer. Promoting the health of your woodlands means managing these damaging species.

While there are many invasive plants already established in Kentucky, there are several new species on their way that you should be on the lookout for. Catching these before they widely establish on your property is much easier than trying to manage them once they are widespread. So, keep your eyes peeled for these (and get rid of them quickly if you find them).

Japanese chaff flower

The threat? This herbaceous plant from Asia grows in very dense stands, excluding native plants. While it is especially problematic along large rivers with floodplains, it also invades bottomland woodlands, roadsides, and field edges. It produces many seeds which can be easily transported in the fur of animals, on clothes and by water or in soil.

How to ID?

- Form: Perennial plant 3-6 feet tall with an extensive root system producing many loosely branched stems.
- Leaves: Opposite and simple, with smooth, wavy margins, and red tinted stems where leaves attach.
- Flowers & seeds: A spike of non-descript flowers without petals elongates and develops over the summer into seeds with stiff hairs.

Photo courtesy: Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

Where is it now? It has already invaded all along the Ohio River and parts of the Red River. It is likely that this will spread rapidly in the near future, particularly along waterways.

Mile-a-minute weed

The threat? This annual herbaceous vine grows very fast and can carpet the ground and grow over native plants, reducing their vigor and killing plants over time. While small patches can be easily pulled up (beware of the sharp barbs on stems), controlling larger areas is a major challenge.

Photo courtesy: Leslie Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

How to ID?

- Form: Annual vines, typically growing as a dense blanket of intertwining shoots.
- Leaves: Triangular leaves and distinctive thorns on stems that are curved downward. Where leaves attach to stems there is a round leaf-like structure that encircles the stem.
- Flowers & seeds: Flowers are green and easy to miss but they develop into berry-like fruit that mature to a metallic blue or purple color.

Where is it now? It is in West Virginia along the border with northeastern KY, and is likely to move into eastern and northern KY in the near future.

Chocolate vine

The threat? Chocolate vine (also called Akebia or Five-fingers) is a perennial, deciduous to evergreen vine that climbs over trees or carpets the forest floor. The vine also produces dense mats in shade which threaten regeneration of desirable trees and other plants in woodlands.

How to ID?

- Form: Stems of vines are green when young and turn brown (and woody) with age
- Leaves: They are compound with five leaflets in a whorl.

These leaflets are bright green on top and lighter green underneath.

- Flowers & seeds: The eye-catching purple flowers emerge in early spring. The large purple seed pods filled with white flesh and black seeds split open when ripe.

Photos courtesy: Leslie Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Where is it now? Chocolate vine is currently scattered throughout the state in several small pockets. There are known infestations in central KY and the Louisville area.

Lesser celandine

The threat?

Lesser celandine, also called fig buttercup, is an invasive spring ephemeral with eye-catching yellow flowers that resulted in its use as a garden plant. However, it escapes landscape settings to stream banks, floodplains, and wet woodlands, where it grows in a dense low carpet, and crowds out native plants. Its many small tubers make it hard to eradicate and promote spread downstream. Besides taking over woodland areas and contributing to erosion, the leaves of lesser celandine are toxic to livestock.

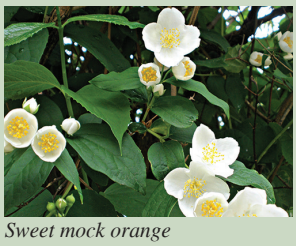
Photos courtesy: John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org - Flower: Leslie Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

How to ID?

- Form: An herbaceous perennial that emerges in early spring, before most native plants. After flowering it dies down, spending the rest of the year dormant below ground. In large patches, the exposed soil increases erosion potential.
- Leaves: Shiny, dark green heart-shaped (or kidney-shaped) leaves, frequently blotched with lighter colored patches on their upper surface.
- Flowers and fruit: Glossy yellow flowers characteristic of buttercups in general. Formation of seeds is infrequent in this area (propagation generally occurs via tubers or bulbils found at base of stems).

Where is it now? Lesser celandine is increasingly common along rivers and streams as well as in bottomlands in northern and central KY and scattered elsewhere in the state.

Other newer invasive plants to look for



Sweet mock orange
Photo courtesy: Ansel Oommen, Bugwood.org

European buckthorn
Photo courtesy: Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

Porcelain-berry
Photo courtesy:James Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Jetbead
Photo courtesy: Leslie Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Biggest risk for your area?

- Northern KY/Louisville - jetbead, lesser celandine, Japanese chaff flower, porcelain-berry, European buckthorn, chocolate vine
- Central KY - porcelain-berry, sweet mock orange, European buckthorn, lesser celandine, chocolate vine
- Eastern KY- mile-a-minute weed, European buck thorn, Japanese chaff flower
- Western KY - Japanese chaff flower, chocolate vine

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