



**Tree-of-Heaven**  
(*Ailanthus altissima*)



**Kudzu**  
(*Pueraria lobata*)

## What makes a plant invasive?

Native plants form the backbone of healthy ecosystems that support our economy and quality of life. But Virginia's landscapes face a threat from a source that may surprise you – invasive plants.

Two criteria make a plant invasive. First, invasive plants are not native to an area, which is generally defined as not present before European settlement. Second, they have some detrimental effect on the environment, economy or health. Not all introduced plants become invasive, and many are beneficial, such as many of our common food plants. Some plants have naturalized, meaning they survive and reproduce in the wild, without causing problems. Only when a non-native plant causes or is likely to cause harm is it labeled as invasive.



**Japanese Stiltgrass**  
(*Microstegium vimineum*)



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## For More Information

For more information about invasive plants, visit these web sites:

<http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspinfo>

<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/unitedstates/va.shtml>

<http://www.invasive.org/species.cfm>

[http://www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/\\_forestry-topics/FT0031\\_Nonnative-Invasive-Plant-Species-Control-Treatments\\_pub.pdf](http://www.dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/_forestry-topics/FT0031_Nonnative-Invasive-Plant-Species-Control-Treatments_pub.pdf)

For more information about VDOF services or programs, please contact your local Virginia Department of Forestry office or visit:

**[www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov)**

**Western Region Office, Salem:**

Phone: (540) 387-5461

**Central Region Office, Charlottesville:**

Phone: (434) 977-5193

**Eastern Region Office, Providence Forge:**

Phone: (804) 966-5092



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900 Natural Resources Drive, Suite 800  
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# INVASIVE PLANTS

*Help Stop the Spread*



Virginia Department of Forestry



**Autumn Olive**  
(*Elaeagnus umbellata*)



**Multiflora Rose**  
(*Rosa multiflora*)



**Oriental Bittersweet**  
(*Celastrus orbiculatus*)



**Japanese Honeysuckle**  
(*Lonicera japonica*)

## What problems do invasive plants cause?

Non-native invasive plants cause economic, health-related or environmental harm in these ways:

- ◆ Upsetting the natural balance of interactions in an ecosystem;
- ◆ Crowding out economically important species, such as native oaks;
- ◆ Causing declines in the wildlife species that depend on native plants;
- ◆ Serving as carriers for diseases that attack native plants;
- ◆ Reducing biodiversity of plants - and animals that depend on them – in an area, and
- ◆ Changing soil chemistry, hydrology or natural fire regimes.

Invasive plants can create negative ripple effects wherever they occur. A native ecosystem is a network of living things and their environment that have developed together over thousands of years. Introducing a new species can cause changes in the whole natural community and subsequent economic impacts. For example, invasive plants can harm wildlife by crowding out native plants that the animals depend on for food. Thickly growing invasive plants can make it difficult to establish young trees, thus impacting a landowner's future income from timber. If an invasive plant carries a disease that attacks a native species, that species could decline or eventually disappear. The loss of native species decreases biodiversity – the overall number of different species in the area, which is often an indicator of ecosystem health. Some invasive plants produce substances that change the chemistry of the soil. Some use so much water that they reduce the amount available to other plants. Some are highly flammable, making the land vulnerable to wildfire.

## What are characteristics of invasive plants?

Invasive plants tend to have some or all of the following traits:

- ◆ They grow rapidly and mature quickly;
- ◆ They produce a heavy seed crop that disperses easily, and/or they spread vegetatively;
- ◆ They have few or no natural predators or diseases to keep them in check outside their native range;
- ◆ They have traits that limit competition from other plants, such as dense roots, production of toxic chemicals or the ability to overtop and shade out other species, and
- ◆ They are often difficult and/or costly to remove or control.

## How can we stop the spread?

Awareness of invasive plants is the first step to keeping them in check.

- ◆ Find out which invasive species are present in your area, and learn to recognize them.
- ◆ Don't intentionally plant any species known to be invasive. Local garden centers sometimes sell invasive plants, but do not buy them!
- ◆ Get rid of invasive plants on your property. Contact your local Extension or Virginia Department of Forestry office for information on the best removal strategies for specific problem plants.
- ◆ Avoid moving seeds or plant parts into new areas – either purposely by picking them, or accidentally on your shoes, clothing, equipment or pets.
- ◆ Get involved in volunteer monitoring and control projects.
- ◆ Spread the word! Teach others what you have learned and encourage them to take action against invasive plants.