

Sustainable Landscaping – Non-Native Invasive Species

One of the biggest threats to our natural areas within Lake Ridge are non-native invasive species. They can also be called “introduced” or “exotic” species, which refers to plants, insects, fish, birds, mammals, and diseases that originate elsewhere and are brought into a new area. Most came from Europe or temperate Asia, which have similar climates to ours. Some were introduced intentionally as ornamental plants, livestock forage, or food and shelter for wildlife. Other introductions were accidental, such as Japanese stiltgrass which was used for packing porcelain shipments. Some of the most common non-native invasive plant species found in Lake Ridge are English ivy, Japanese honeysuckle, garlic mustard, autumn olive, mile-a-minute, multi-flora rose, Japanese stiltgrass and Tree-of-heaven.

Not every introduced species becomes invasive, but those that do can directly compete with native species for habitat and food or spread diseases. Since the introduced species are not a natural component of the ecological system, they have not co-evolved with the native species. They generally reproduce through multiple pathways (roots, stems, abundant seeds) and grow quickly because their new habitat lacks any natural predators or pests, which helps explain their success. Some will even release chemicals into the soil that will inhibit growth or kill surrounding native plants. Just under half of the endangered plants and animals in the US have been negatively impacted by non-native, invasive species. In the US alone, these species cause an estimated \$138 billion in economic damage each year.

On the bright side, there are several easy things you can do to reduce the spread of non-native invasive species within our community.

- **Remove Hitchhikers From Your Hiking Gear and Pets** – Weed seeds often stick to clothing, boots, camping gear, and pets which spread non-native plants to new areas.
- **Don't Move Firewood** – Firewood can possibly be infected with non-native insect species such as emerald ash borer or spotted lanternfly so moving firewood can spread them to new areas. Support local firewood providers and burn it where you buy it.
- **Love Your Pets** – Many invasive animal species can be traced back to people releasing pets into the wild. If you can no longer care for your pets, please find someone who will, a pet store, or adoption center.
- **Inspect Boating Gear and Remove Fishing Bait** – After removing boats from the water, make sure live wells are drained, and inspect boats and trailers for unwanted hitchhikers such as snails and aquatic plants. Never release baitfish into the water unless it came out of that body of water.
- **Reduce Soil Disturbance** – Any bare or newly disturbed soil should be preferably seeded with a seed mix native to our region. Leaving bare or disturbed soil allows for erosion and the spread of non-native invasive plants.
- **Remove Non-Native Invasive Plants** – Identify these troublesome plants on your property and learn proper control methods. I will continue to discuss this topic in future issues as each species can have unique control methods.



Mile-a-minute vine smothering native vegetation
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