

Start Taking Action Against Invasive Species

“Invasive species” are non-native species whose introduction to new areas causes or is likely to cause harm to our economy, environment and/or human health. The best way to control invasive species is to prevent them from occurring in the first place. Once the presence of an invader is detected in an area, take steps to restore the ecological balance and eradicate them!

Invasive species cause economic harm. For example, honeysuckle has chemical defenses that can prevent other plants from growing nearby. This prevents the next generation of oak trees from growing in the woods and future timber harvests are lost or reduced. When weeds such as Canada thistle or poison hemlock invade crop fields and pastures, farmers spend more money on labor or herbicides to remove them.

Invasive species, including plants, cause environmental harm by displacing or crowding out native species. This displacement impacts wildlife, which rely on native plants for food, shelter, and habitat. For example, most pollinators are specialists and will not persist in an area if the native plants on which they depend disappear under a surge of invasive plants.

Some invasive species can be harmful to one’s health too. For example, the sap of poison hemlock and giant hogweed is toxic and can cause dangerous burns if it touches human skin.

The first step is to learn how to recognize invasive species. Go to the Ohio Invasive Plants Council website for factsheets and photos at <https://www.oipc.info/invasive-plants-of-ohio.html> If you are having trouble identifying the species in question, you may contact your county extension office for further assistance.

The second step is to report occurrences of invasive species. Some species, such as Asian longhorned beetle, can be easily eradicated if caught early. The Central Ohio Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management was formed to develop a coordinated approach to prevent, combat and improve awareness of invasive species. Visit <https://centralohprism.org> to get involved in the effort in central Ohio and learn more about how to report observed occurrences.

The third step you can take is to volunteer for organized efforts to remove invasive species from natural areas and your own property. It is a learning opportunity as well as a way to give back to the community.

The fourth step is to help educate others about the threat of invasive species. Most people, when they see these plants with their green leaves, showy flowers and fruits, do not realize how detrimental they are to our native plants and wildlife. They may not even know that they have an invasive species planted in their flowerbed! If each of us helped one more person to be aware of the harm invasive species can cause, the total impact in restoring an ecological balance would be great.

If this information is overwhelming, keep in mind that Ohio has fewer than 100 known invasive species. Break down your project into manageable steps and replace with native species as you go. Consult with your local SWCD or OSU Extension office for more information on removing invasive plants from your land.