An invasive plant is one that has a negative impact on the habitat in which it becomes established. Many invasive species are not native to Westchester, originating from Asia, Europe, or other parts of the United States. They dominate areas where they become established. They are commonly found along roadsides, the edges of lawns and forests, in open areas, and in many other areas where native vegetation has been disturbed. Some invasive species, such as Burning Bush, Japanese Barberry, and English Ivy, are often sold as ornamental plants for use in landscaping.

Non-native invasive plants, whether accidentally introduced or purposely used in gardening, aggressively push out native plants because there are no naturally occurring predators, insects and/or diseases to control their populations. If invasive plants are growing around your home, removing them can help prevent their taking over your yard, or spreading further. It is important to recognize invasive plants and avoid planting them, because when they “escape” from gardens, they may alter the natural ecosystem or cause other harm.

WHAT IS AN INVASIVE PLANT?

Frequent mowing. Some invasive plants cannot tolerate frequent mowing or cutting during the growing season, especially if it occurs over a period of two to five years.

Pulling plants out by the roots. Many plants, especially young ones, can easily be pulled out of the ground, roots and all. Others are easily dug out with a shovel or other tool.

Cutting flowers before seeds develop. Plants that spread by seed can be controlled by eliminating their seed production by clipping buds and flowers.

Use native plant alternatives in your garden or around your home! It is much harder for invasive plants to take over an area where native plants are already strongly established.

The application of systemic herbicide to leaves and stems. Herbicide can be applied to leaves and stems during the active growing season, or to the surface of a cut plant immediately after it has been cut. Be certain to follow manufacturers’ directions or defer to the expertise of a licensed applicator, especially when using herbicides close to, or in, streams, ponds, etc.

WHY ARE INVASIVE PLANTS A GROWING CONCERN?

Unintended Consequences. Disturbed areas, such as where soil has been tilled, drainage altered or trees removed, may inadvertently help invasive plants grow and spread. Many invasive plants thrive in these areas because their unique adaptations enable them to quickly colonize and then out-compete other plants.

Rapid Spread. Invasive plants spread quickly with the help of animal and human movements, wind and water, which efficiently disperse plant seeds and regenerative stems and roots. Invasive plants can take over areas before native plants become established.

Harm to Wildlife. Wildlife often relies on specific native plants and is negatively impacted when native species decline or disappear. Invasive plants also pose problems to farmers and park managers because they compete with crops and desirable native plants.

HELPFUL REMOVAL HINTS

The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation has published a native plant brochure that lists plant varieties native to Westchester. The brochure features the growing conditions of each species.

Want to “Go Native?”

Go Native

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Westchester County’s Most INVASIVE Plants

The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation has published a native plant brochure that lists plant varieties native to Westchester. The brochure features the growing conditions of each species.
**Trees**

**Norway Maple** (*Acer platanoides*)
*Profile:* tall tree, deciduous, similar to the native Sugar Maple (when the stems of leaves are broken off branches of Norway Maple, milky sap leaks from stem; clear sap leaks from Sugar Maple), commonly sold in nurseries but is prolific seed producer and emits chemical that inhibits growth of other plants under and around them.

**Winged Euonymus** (*Euonymus alatus*)
(a.k.a. Burning Bush)
*Profile:* moderate height, deciduous shrub; bright red leaves in fall; corky wings along stem; smooth, reddish fruit; widely sold in nurseries but escapes not only into the wild but also other landscape plantings, grows in sun and shade and tolerates variety of soil conditions.

**Common Reed** (*Phragmites sp.*)
*Profile:* very tall grass found in and around moist sites of both fresh and salt waters, often colonizing disturbed sites; silky flower heads at the top of a long stalk; dead stalks from previous growing season persist through winter, next spring; largely spread by below-ground roots, forming dense colonies; native but the more aggressive European variety is now dominating Northeast.

**Purple Loosestrife** (*Lythrum salicaria*)
*Profile:* perennial (to ten feet in height); similar to bamboo with hollow stems; white or greenish flowers and heart-shaped leaves; densely growing perennial; leaves have many small white flowers; hard yellow, green, or reddish brown branches; green or reddish purple leaves; red berries; sold in nurseries but escapes to woodlands and meadows to dominate due to ability to grow in sun or shade.

**Japanese Barberry** (*Berberis thunbergii*)
*Profile:* medium height; dense branches; thorns; reddish brown branches; green or reddish purple leaves; red berries; sold in nurseries but escapes to woodlands and meadows to dominate due to ability to grow in sun or shade.

**Multiflora Rose** (*Rosa multiflora*)
*Profile:* medium height; deciduous shrub with arching and scrambling branches; sharp thorns; white fragrant flowers; small red to purplish berries; found in woods and meadows; one of earliest woodland plants to develop leaves.

**Oriental Bittersweet** (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)
*Profile:* woody, deciduous vine; twigs have coarse hairs; yellow to greenish white flowers; hard yellow, green, or lilac fruits ripen then turn bright blue, white or marbled; climbs and smothers existing plants.

**Garlic Mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*)
*Profile:* biennial (two-year life cycle) with garlic odor when leaves crushed; triangular leaves; clusters of small white flowers in early spring; strong climber in sun; wraps around shrubs and trees; girdling them; used for wreaths, which helps spread seeds.

**Grasses**

**Common Reed** (*Phragmites sp.*)
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**Japanese Stilt Grass** (*Microstegium vimineum*)
*Profile:* annual grass typically forms dense, low mats, but stems may grow up to four feet tall, leaves lance-shaped with white veins and smooth or slightly hairy; flowering in late summer and seed heads form in the fall; especially well-adapted to low-light conditions (not dense shade).

**Additional Invasive Plants to Watch For and Avoid in Westchester**

**Trees**
- **Black Locust** (*Robinia pseudacacia*)
  - Tree of Heaven (Ailanthus altissima)

**Shrubs**
- **Japanese Wineberry** (*Rosa multiflora*)
- **Japanese Viburnum** (*Viburnum japonicum*)
- **Mile-a-Minute** (*Persicaria perfoliata*)
- **Japanese Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera japonica*)
- **Giant Hogweed** (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)
- **Japanese Wineberry** (*Rosa multiflora*)
- **Japanese Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera japonica*)
- **Black Swallow-wart** (*Cynanchum louiseae*)
- **Pale Swallow-wart** (*Cynanchum rossicum*)
- **Garlic Mustard** (*Alliaria petiolata*)
- **Eurasian Milfoil** (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)
- **Water Chestnut** (*Trapa natans*)

**Aquatics**
- **Eurasian Milfoil** (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)
- **Water Chestnut** (*Trapa natans*)
- **Black Swallow-wart** (*Cynanchum louiseae*)
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