

MINIVASION

of the plants!

By Tom Adair, *Natural Resource Manager*
Photos by John Pogacnik

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP!

- Tell others about the threats invasive vegetation poses to native wildlife and plants.
- Become familiar with the invasive plants in your backyard or neighborhood. A quick internet search will provide many species descriptions, images and control recommendations for invasive plants near you.
- Be careful not to transport unidentified seeds that may spread invasive plants. Avoid disturbing natural areas by dumping yard waste into natural areas.
- Plant native or non-invasive plants in your yard and garden; eradicate invasive plants on your property.
- Help encourage local nurseries to avoid invasive non-native plants and stock alternative native or non-invasive plant species.
- Become a volunteer with Lake Metroparks to help control invasive plants in a park near you! For more information on volunteering: 440-585-3418

LAKE METROPARKS HAS RAMPED UP its invasive plant species management efforts considerably over the last few years. As part of its primary mission, Lake Metroparks is charged with conserving and preserving the natural resources of Lake County.

In recent decades, non-native and invasive plant species have threatened native plant communities by displacing them. This crowding out of native species can lead to monocultures (areas in which one plant species tends to predominate the entire landscape). A monoculture is characterized by very low biodiversity. Plant diversity is important for wildlife habitat as many animals depend on a variety of native plants for food and shelter.

There are more than 100 state listed (endangered, threatened or special interest) plant and animal species that have been identified within Lake Metroparks. These species are under particular stress as a result of expanding invasive plant populations.

As part of its resource management practices, the park district has made a regular practice of identifying, monitoring and prioritizing management recommendations on these invasive plant populations. Once prioritized, management actions are implemented. Staff members from several departments within Lake Metroparks employ a combination of physical and chemical treatments to

manage these infestations. Over the years, a number of very dedicated volunteers have also been instrumental in helping the parks to manage invasive plants.

According to the Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, "there are about 3,000 species of plants that have been identified in the wild in Ohio. Of these, about 75% are native or have occurred in Ohio before the time of substantial European settlement around the year 1750. The other 25% (around 700 to 800 species) are not native to our state, having been introduced from outside of Ohio and from around the world."

Many of these species were originally introduced into gardens, cities and agricultural land and may never spread enough to threaten native plants. However, there are a few species that become very invasive and compete with native plants in forests, meadows, wetlands, stream corridors and other natural areas. Although some non-native, invasive plants are introduced by accident, others have been introduced for applications in erosion control, horticulture, crop production and medicine.

Well intending people also plant non-native plants for backyard wildlife watching or landscaping without realizing the negative impacts that may result from escape into natural areas. A lack of natural predators or biological controls will cause the plants to spread rapidly and displace native plants.

The following are a few of the more common terrestrial and aquatic non-native, invasive plant species with general descriptions from the Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED

(*Polygonum cuspidatum*) is a shrub-like herb that grows up to ten feet tall. Stems are smooth and the pointed leaves vary from broadly oval to almost triangular. Flowers are greenish-white and very small. The seeds are dispersed by wind. Once established, the plants spread by a system of underground stems reaching 60 feet. Japanese knotweed can grow in a wide variety of habitats. It is found in open areas like roadsides, stream banks and woodland edges. It spreads quickly and forms dense thickets.



COMMON REED

(*Phragmites australis*) or Phragmites, is a grass that reaches up to 15 feet in height. The leaves are smooth, stiff and wide with coarse hollow stems. The big, plume-like flower head is grayish-purple when in fruit. Common reed spreads mostly vegetatively forming huge colonies by sprouting new shoots through underground stems (rhizomes). Common reed grows in open wetland habitats and ditches. It occurs in still water areas of marshes, lake shores, riverbanks and disturbed or polluted soils, often creating pure stands.



REED CANARY GRASS

(*Phalaris arundinacea*) is a large, coarse grass that reaches 2 to 5 feet tall. The hairless stems gradually taper to flat and rough leaf blades 3 to 10 inches long. The flowers occur in dense clusters and are green to purple, changing to beige and becoming more open over time. The plant spreads aggressively both by seed and by forming a thick system of underground stems (rhizomes). This grass occurs in wetlands like marshes, wet prairies, meadows, fens, stream banks and seasonally wet areas. Reed canary grass has been planted widely for forage and erosion control.



BUSH HONEYSUCKLES (*Lonicera* sp.) are upright shrubs that can grow 6 to 15 feet in height. Each have dark green, egg-shaped leaves. The tubular flowers are white on the Amur Honeysuckle and the Morrow's Honeysuckle (changing to yellow with age), and pink on the Tatarian Honeysuckle. Berries range from red to orange, occasionally yellow, and are eaten and dispersed by birds. The bush honeysuckles inhabit abandoned fields, roadsides, woodlands and edges of marshes.

