

# **Control of Invasive Plants**

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This guide lists garden plants and weeds which are already causing significant changes to natural areas in the Mid-Atlantic. **Measures for controlling each species are indicated by number, e.g., (3), in the text with a full explanation at the end of this article.** Click on the word [Control](#): to jump to that section. Then click your "back" button to return to the text. Following each section suggested alternative plants are given. These alternatives are native plants, well adapted and needing little care, attractive to birds and butterflies, and an important part of the food web for our indigenous species.

## INVASIVE TREES

**NORWAY MAPLE** (*Acer platanoides*) has large leaves similar to sugar maple. To easily confirm that the plant is Norway maple, break off a leaf and if it's truly Norway maple it will exude milky white sap. Fall foliage is yellow. (Exception: cultivars such as 'Crimson King,' which have red leaves in spring or summer, may have red autumn leaves.) The leaves turn color late, usually in late October after native trees have dropped their foliage. This tree suppresses growth of grass, garden plants, and forest understory beneath it, at least as far as the drip-line. Its wind-borne seeds can germinate and grow in deep shade. The presence of young Norway maples in our woodlands is increasing.

[Control](#): (1); (7), (8), (9), or (10); (11) in mid-October to early November, before the leaves turn color.

**TREE OF HEAVEN** (*Ailanthus altissima*), is incredibly tough and can grow in the poorest conditions. It produces huge quantities of wind-borne seeds, grows rapidly, and secretes a toxin that kills other plants. Its long compound leaves, with 11-25 lance-shaped leaflets, smell like peanut butter or burnt coffee when crushed. Once established, this tree cannot be removed by mechanical means alone.

[Control](#): (1) - seedlings only. Herbicide - use Garlon 3a (9) with no more than a 1" gap between cuts, or (10); plus (11) on re-growth. Or paint bottom 12" of bark with Garlon 4 Ultra (in February or March to protect surrounding plants). USE MAXIMUM STRENGTH SPECIFIED ON LABEL for all herbicide applications on Ailanthus. Glyphosate is not effective against Ailanthus.

## INVASIVE SHRUBS

**AUTUMN OLIVE** (*Eleagnus umbellata*): Formerly recommended for erosion control and wildlife value, these have proved highly invasive and diminish the overall quality of wildlife habitat.

[Control](#): (1) - up to 4" diameter trunks; (7) or (10) or bury stump. Do not mow.

**MULTIFLORA ROSE** (*Rosa multiflora*), formerly recommended for erosion control, hedges, and wildlife habitat, becomes a huge shrub that chokes out all other vegetation and is too dense for many species of birds to nest in, though a few favor it. In shade, it grows up trees like a vine. It is covered with white flowers in June. (Our native roses have fewer flowers, mostly pink.) Distinguish multiflora by its size, and by the presence of very hard, curved thorns, and a fringed edge to the leaf stalk.

[Control](#): (1) - pull seedlings, dig out larger plants at least 6" from the crown and 6" down; (4) on extensive infestations; (10) or (11). It may remain green in winter, so herbicide may *applied when other plants are dormant. For foliar application, mix Rodeo with extra sticker-spreader, or use Roundup Sure Shot Foam on small plants.*

**BUSH HONEYSUCKLES** (*Lonicera spp.*), including Belle, Amur, Morrow's, and Tatarian honeysuckle. (In our region, assume that any honeysuckle is exotic unless it is a scarlet-flowered vine). Bush honeysuckles create denser shade than native shrubs, reducing plant diversity and eliminating nest sites for many forest interior species.

Control: (2) on ornamentals; (1); on shady sites only, brush cut in early spring and again in early fall (3); (4) during the growing season; (7); or (10) late in the growing season.

**BLUNT-LEAVED PRIVET** (*Ligustrum obtusifolium*). Control: (1); (7) or (10); or trim off all flowers. Do not cut back or mow.

**BURNING BUSH, WINGED EUONYMUS** (*Euonymus alatus*), identified by wide, corky wings on the branches.

Control: (1); (7) or (10); or trim off all flowers.

**JAPANESE BARBERRY** (*Berberis thunbergii*), and all cultivars and varieties.

Control: (1); (7) or (10); or trim off all flowers.

### INVASIVE WOODY VINES

All of these vines shade out the shrubs and young trees of the forest understory, eventually killing them, and changing the open structure of the forest into a dense tangle. DO NOT PLANT NEXT TO OPEN SPACE.

**JAPANESE HONEYSUCKLE** (*Lonicera japonica*), including Hall's honeysuckle, has gold-and-white flowers with a heavenly scent and sweet nectar in June. This is probably the familiar honeysuckle of your childhood. It is a rampant grower that spirals around trees, often strangling them.

Control: (1); (3); (10); (11) in fall or early spring when native vegetation is dormant. Plan to re-treat repeatedly.

**ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET** (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) has almost completely displaced American bittersweet (*C. scandens*). The Asian plant has its flowers and bright orange seed capsules in clusters all along the stem, while the native species bears them only at the branch tips.

Control: (1); keep ornamental plants cut back, remove all fruits as soon as they open, and bag or burn fruits; to eradicate use Garlon 3a (10).

**JAPANESE KNOTWEED, MEXICAN BAMBOO** (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) can grow in shade. The stems have knotty joints, reminiscent of bamboo. It grows 6-10' tall and has large pointed oval or triangular leaves.

Control: Cut at least 3 times each growing season and/or treat with Rodeo (10) or (11). In gardens, heavy mulch or dense shade may kill it.

### INVASIVE HERBACEOUS PLANTS

**GARLIC MUSTARD** (*Alliaria petiolata*, *A. officinalis*), a white-flowered biennial with rough, scalloped leaves (kidney-, heart- or arrow-shaped), recognizable by the smell of garlic and taste of mustard when its leaves are crushed. (The odor fades by fall.)

Control: Pull before it flowers in spring (1), removing crown and roots. Tamp down soil afterwards. Once it has flowered, cut (2), being careful not to scatter seed, then bag and burn or send to the landfill. (11) may be appropriate in some settings.

**JAPANESE STILT GRASS** (*Microstegium vimineum*) can be identified by its lime-green color and a line of silvery hairs down the middle of the 2-3" long blade. It tolerates sun or dense shade and quickly invades areas left bare or disturbed by tilling or flooding. An annual grass, it builds up a large seed bank in the soil.

Control: Easily pulled in early to mid-summer (1) - be sure to pull before it goes to seed. If seeds have formed, bag and burn or send to landfill. Mowing weekly or when it has just begun to flower may prevent it from setting seed (3). Use glyphosate (11) or herbicidal soap (less effective) on large infestations. Follow up with (5) in spring.

**MILE-A-MINUTE VINE, DEVIL'S TAIL TEARTHUMB** (*Polygonum perfoliatum*), a rapidly growing annual vine with triangular leaves, barbed stems, and turquoise berries in August which are spread by birds. It quickly covers and shades out herbaceous plants.

Control: same as for stilt grass.

**SPOTTED KNAPWEED** (*Centaurea maculosa*), a biennial with thistle-like flowers.

Control: Do NOT pull (1) unless the plant is young and the ground is very soft - the tap root will break off and produce several new plants. Wear sturdy gloves. (2); (6); (10) or (11).

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**CONTROL MEASURES**

- (1) PULL seedlings and small or shallow-rooted plants when soil is moist. Dig out larger plants, including the root systems. Use a forked spade or weed wrench for trees or shrubs.
- (2) DEADHEAD to prevent spread of seeds of invasive plants. Cut off seeds or fruits before they ripen. Bag, and burn or send to a landfill.
- (3) MOW or CUTTING at least 4 times a season to deplete plants' store of nutrients and carbohydrates, reduce seed formation, and kill or minimize spread of plants. If necessary, repeat each year.
- (4) CONTROLLED BURNING during the spring, repeated over several years, allows native vegetation to compete more effectively with the invasive species. This requires a permit. Spot treatment with glyphosate in late fall can be used to make this method more effective.
- (5) Use a CORN-BASED PRE-EMERGENCE HERBICIDE on annual weeds. This product is also an organic fertilizer, i.e., it can stimulate growth of existing plants, including weeds, so it is appropriate for lawns and gardens but may not be appropriate in woodlands.
- (6) In lawns, SPOT TREAT with BROAD-LEAF WEEDKILLER. Good lawn-care practices (test soil; use lime and fertilizer only when soil test shows a need; mow high and frequently; leave clippings on lawn) reduce weed infestations.
- (7) CUT DOWN the tree. Grind out the stump, or clip off re-growth.
- (8) GIRDLE tree: cut through the bark and growing layer (cambium) all around the trunk, about 6" above the ground. Girdling is most effective in spring when the sap is rising, and from middle to late summer when the tree is sending down food to the roots. Clip off sucker sprouts.
- (9) FRILL: Using a machete, hatchet or similar device, hack scars (several holes in larger trees) downward into the cambium layer, and squirt in glyphosate (or triclopyr if recommended in text above). Follow label directions for Injection and Frill Applications. This is most effective from middle to late summer. Clip off any sucker sprouts or treat with glyphosate.
- (10) CUT STEM / CUT STUMP WITH GLYPHOSATE (or triclopyr if specified above). Follow label directions for Cut Stump Application. Clip off sucker sprouts or paint with glyphosate. See Note on Herbicides.
- (11) FOLIAR SPRAY WITH GLYPHOSATE herbicide (see Note on Herbicides). Use a backpack or garden sprayer or mist blower, following label directions. Avoid overspray and/or dripping onto non-target plants, because glyphosate kills most plants except moss. If it rolls off waxy or grass-like foliage, use additional sticker-spreader. Deciduous trees, shrubs, and perennials move nutrients down to the roots in late summer. Glyphosate is particularly effective at this time and when plants have just gone out of flowering. Several invasive species retain their foliage after native plants have lost theirs, and resume growth earlier in spring than most natives. This allows you to treat them without harming the natives. However, the plant must be actively growing for the herbicide to work. Retreatments may be necessary the following year if suckering occurs or the plant hasn't been entirely killed.

NOTE ON HERBICIDES: It is highly recommended that small populations try to be controlled using non-chemical methods wherever feasible. However, for large infestations, and for a few plants specified above, herbicide use is essential. Apply herbicides carefully to avoid non-target plants, glyphosate is the least environmentally damaging herbicide in most cases. Add food coloring for visibility, and a soap-based sticker such as Cide-Kick. Glyphosate is ineffective on some

plants; for these, triclopyr (Garlon) may be indicated. When using herbicides, read the entire label and observe all precautions listed, including proper disposal. If in doubt, call your local Cooperative Extension Service.