

Concern Grows as Invasive Plants Take Root in Stow

In Northeast Ohio, amidst the region's natural beauty, a concerning issue is taking root as invasive plant species continue to encroach upon ecosystems. Among these invaders are the landscape tree Callery pears (*Pyrus calleryana*). Some other invasives effecting our wildlife are Japanese honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and buckthorn, which collectively pose a significant threat to the region's delicate balance.

Invasive plants can wreak havoc on native habitats. Their aggressive growth and ability to outcompete native vegetation can lead to a decline in biodiversity and disrupt the ecological equilibrium that supports the local flora and fauna. Bird species are finding native food sources being replaced by these non-native plants.

Originating from Asia and initially introduced as ornamental trees, Callery pears have rapidly spread beyond cultivation, infiltrating natural habitats throughout Northeast Ohio. Their fast growth rate enables them to establish quickly, forming dense thickets that outcompete native plants for essential resources. Introduced as a landscape specimen tree, loved for its spring flowers and size, it is now spreading rapidly by birds who eat the fruit and spread the seeds. Large thickets of Callery pear can be seen under high tension wires and in scrub land along the highways. As of January 1, 2023 the Callery pear is illegal to sell, grow or plant in Ohio.

Japanese honeysuckle, known for its rapid vine growth and fragrant flowers, has also become a pervasive problem. This invasive species dominates forest edges and chokes out native plants, reducing biodiversity and disrupting wildlife habitats.

Multiflora rose, with its thorny canes and abundant white flowers, presents another challenge. Its aggressive nature allows it to overtake open spaces, displacing native vegetation and altering the landscape. This invasive rose poses a threat to the region's natural diversity and can impede agricultural productivity.

Buckthorn, a shrub or small tree native to Europe and Asia, completes the big 4 of invasive plants wreaking havoc in Northeast Ohio. Its dense growth shades out native species and creates a barrier that limits the movement of wildlife. Buckthorn can form impenetrable thickets, altering forest understories and impacting the food web.

The invasion of these plants is largely due to their ability to outcompete native plants. Without natural controls, such as pests or diseases that regulate populations in their native habitats, these invasive species have gained a competitive edge in Northeast Ohio's ecosystems. Conservationists and land managers face significant challenges in eradicating these invasives. The removal of established plants requires intensive efforts, and the regenerative abilities of these species often demand ongoing management to prevent re-infestation.

Efforts are underway to address the problem. Local organizations and volunteers are engaged in invasive species removal projects, aiming to restore native habitats and protect the region's biodiversity. Restoration programs that involve planting native species are gaining traction, with the aim of reestablishing a balanced and resilient ecosystem. Stow's Landscape Arborist and the Urban Forestry Commission will conduct an educational walk to assist attendee's in identifying the above invasive species. The program will take place at Silver Springs Park on Thursday October 5, 2023 at 6 p.m. with a rain date of Saturday October 14, 2023 at 9 a.m. Meet at the S.O.A. R. playground parking lot at Silver Springs Park, 5027 Stow Road.