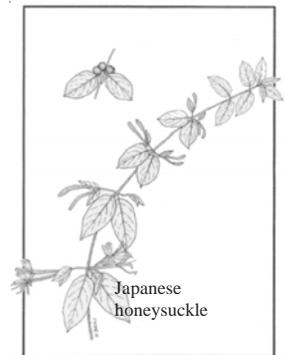




Invasive Exotic Species

Recently some plants have been getting some bad press, and with good reason. Invasive exotic species are recognized as the number two threat to native ecosystems, second only to habitat destruction. Think about that for a moment. These plants have an impact on natural communities comparable to paving them over.

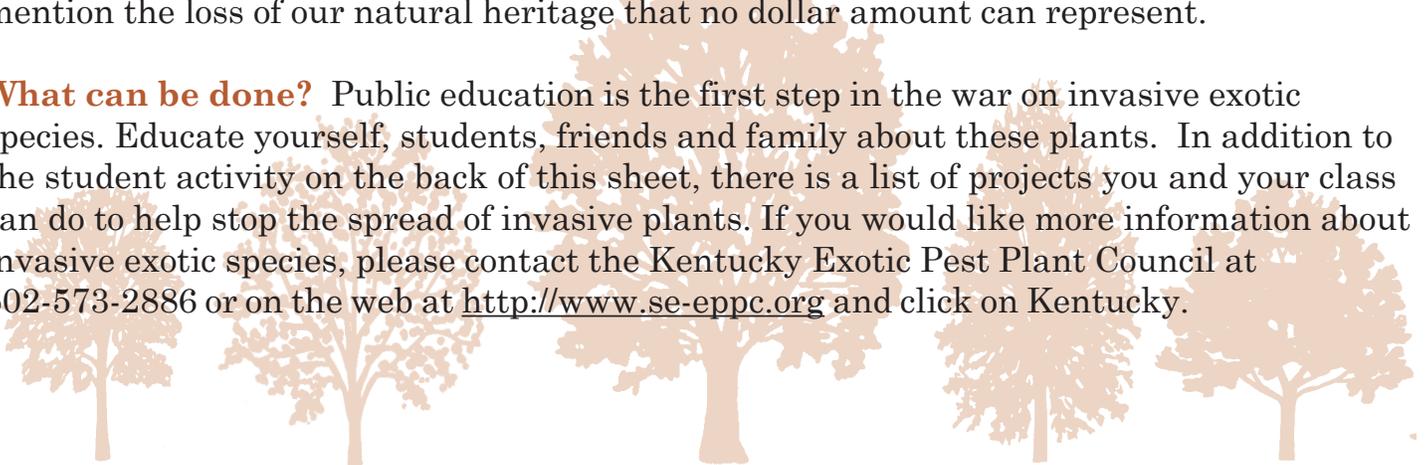
So, what gives these plants the ability to out compete natives? An exotic species is a plant or animal brought in from other continents, regions, ecosystems or habitats. In the move, they leave behind the insects, herbivores, and diseases that evolved over thousands of years along with them to keep their populations in check. These plants also tend to display aggressive traits such as strong vegetative growth, abundant seed production, long-lived seeds and rapid maturation. These qualities give them yet another advantage over native plants.



What's so bad about them? Invasive exotic species can crowd out native plant populations and reduce biodiversity. They may alter soil chemistry and water flow and provide less efficient food and shelter for native animals.

How did they get here? In the past, many exotic species were brought by early settlers for food, medicine and as reminders of home. Some were brought over accidentally in ship ballasts, shipping crates and in soil. Today, exotics are also promoted as ornamental garden plants, wildlife food sources and for soil stabilization. Many exotic plants stay where they are planted and have little consequence on natural areas. However, **invasive** exotic species spread where they are not wanted and cost farmers, land managers, the logging industry and you- a consumer and tax payer- billions of dollars annually. Not to mention the loss of our natural heritage that no dollar amount can represent.

What can be done? Public education is the first step in the war on invasive exotic species. Educate yourself, students, friends and family about these plants. In addition to the student activity on the back of this sheet, there is a list of projects you and your class can do to help stop the spread of invasive plants. If you would like more information about invasive exotic species, please contact the Kentucky Exotic Pest Plant Council at 502-573-2886 or on the web at <http://www.se-eppc.org> and click on Kentucky.



PLANTS OUT OF PLACE

This activity will allow students to gain and share information about invasive plants in their area.

Have students divide into groups to research an exotic species found in Kentucky. Students will be able to find out about these plants by doing an Internet search on invasive exotic species or by contacting local state and county land management agencies. For younger students, assign them a plant to research.

Each group will design an informative poster about their plant. Have students be prepared to answer:

1. Where in Kentucky is the plant found?
2. Where is it originally found?
3. How did it get here?
4. Where does the plant grow (wetlands, open fields, woods)?
5. What makes it such an aggressive plant?
6. How can the plant be controlled?
7. What native plant could be suggested as an alternative?



After students have shared information about their plant, take a walk around the school and neighborhood. Have the students point out any invasive plants they may find. That evening have students look for exotic species around where they live. Discuss what can be done to make the community “weed free” and the long and short-term benefits it would have on the natural community.

STOP THE SPREAD OF INVASIVE PLANTS: A LIST OF THINGS YOU AND YOUR CLASS CAN DO

- Create a native plant demonstration garden.
- Use plants native to your region in your outdoor classroom.
- Adopt a roadside or park area; work with your county extension agent, local nature center, state park or land management agency to remove weed infestations. Volunteer for weed pulls!
- Be aware of what is in your backyard! Encourage friends and family to avoid planting invasive plants and remove existing infestations on your property.
- Research invasive plants found in your area and create bulletin boards and informational signs, conduct community outreach (speeches, newspaper articles, posters, brochures, buttons, signs, videos) to inform citizens about weeds in your area.

If you would like more information about classroom activities about native and invasive plants, please contact the Kentucky Division of Forestry at 502-564-4496.

