

Spreading the Word about Invasive Plant Species
Rutland Herald Time Argus
Published: April 12, 2009

By Kathy Doyle

MONTPELIER – Sharon Plumb, Invasive Species Coordinator for the Vermont Nature Conservancy wants to inspire more people to work together to keep invasive plants from spreading in Vermont. Thanks to the efforts of the Nature Conservancy and many partner organizations, gardeners, road crew members, foresters, teachers, land owners, fisherman, hunters, students, and business owners will have the opportunity to become energized to take steps to address this important issue in the months ahead.

Invasive plants are those that are introduced to a new area where because they are free from their natural competitors are able to outcompete native species and proliferate, causing considerable harm to native habitats. According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN) after habitat destruction, the introduction of invasive species is the greatest cause of extinction of native species worldwide. Increasingly Vermonters are becoming more aware of the considerable harm done by invasive plants. Plumb notes that hunters are concerned about dense thickets of barberry that make it difficult to walk in the woods. Foresters are concerned about the loss of productivity due to plants such as glossy and common buckthorn that impede the regeneration of native trees. Fishermen complain about Japanese knotweed spreading along rivers; because few native insects eat Japanese knotweed there are fewer fish where the plant is abundant. Wildflower enthusiasts lament the loss of spring wildflowers in woodlands where garlic mustard dominates the understory.

But there are things that can be done to address the spread of invasive plants.

Our gardening and landscaping choices can make a huge difference because the majority of invasive plants spread from home gardens and landscape plantings. According to the American Nurseryman's Association, 85% of all woody invasive plants which invade natural areas were initially introduced as ornamental and landscape plants. Yet, not all non-native species have the tendency to become invasive. Indeed the VT Exotic Invasive Plant Committee reports that only about 8% of non-native plants species have demonstrated the potential to do environmental and economic harm. Thus it is important for gardeners, landscapers and garden centers to be aware of those species with the potential to become invasive and to not sell or plant them.

Through Vermont's noxious weed quarantine law, it is illegal to import, move, sell, possess, cultivate or distribute 32 invasive plants within Vermont. There are a number of other species that are not regulated, but which have the potential to be highly invasive in Vermont, based on the IPANE database which documents the species that are or are likely to become invasive in New England. Four species not regulated in Vermont, but which are a concern are Norway maple, common and Japanese barberry and burning bush. Plumb encourages the public to send in documentation and photographs of sites in

Vermont where these plants are increasing to help the committee evaluate if they should be added to the state quarantine list.

Early detection and rapid response are critical. Therefore, it is important for people to be out in the woods, walking along roads and looking for newly established invasive populations and removing the species, before it becomes a huge problem. Road crews can play a huge role in early detection and rapid response. Considering that many invasive species spread along travel corridors, appropriate roadside management is essential. Encourage your town road crew to attend a workshop about managing invasive plants and then publically thank them for making the issue a priority. Vermont Local Roads will be hosting a program this summer, and Director Sally Collopy notes that road crews have a lot on their plates, so having an extra incentive to attend is a plus.

Plumb says that raising awareness and working together is critical. She encourages anyone to attend a “Train the Trainer” WOW workshop or one of the other workshops described below. Plumb says she would especially like to see more people register for the April 23 workshop in Manchester to learn how to spread the word to others. Plumb emphasizes that you don’t need to be an expert to become involved.

The Nature Conservancy is collaborating with partners to establish Wise on Weeds (WOW) demonstration sites all over Vermont. These sites are a great way to highlight what invasive-free landscaping looks like and to encourage others to take similar steps. Plumb says they are working to add sites to the current list of twenty. Encourage your town office, church, work place or favorite organization to join Hildene, Smuggler’s Notch Ski Area, Clarendon Elementary, Hildene and Southern Vermont Art Center in becoming a WOW demonstration site.

“Working together to remove invasive plants in parks or other conserved lands can be a wonderful opportunity for multiple generations to get out in the woods and learn about plants” says Plumb. At Clarendon Elementary, Jan McCoy’s 4th graders have been pulling garlic mustard in the school woods since 2007 and have recently begun removing Japanese knotweed as well. Thanks to the student’s efforts, McCoy says we have noticed a decline in garlic mustard and are looking forward to seeing more native trout lilies in the school woods this spring.

Upcoming Workshops in Vermont:

Train the Trainer Workshops: The Nature Conservancy will train individuals to give Wise on Weeds (WOW) presentations to the public and to be an advocate in their communities. Contact Sharon Plumb: splumb@tnc.org, 802-229-4425 x-120.

April 23: 6 – 9 p.m. Hildene, Manchester Center.

April 30: 6 – 9 p.m. The Nature Conservancy, Montpelier.

Get Wise on Weeds: Learn how to identify invasive plant species and how to control them. Designed for home gardeners or land manager.

June 6, 1 – 3 p.m. Hosted by Montshire Museum, Norwich; 802-649-2200.
June 13, 9:30 – 12:00, Hosted by Hildene, Manchester; 802-362-1564.

Roadside Weed Management: The Nature Conservancy and VT Agency of Transportation are collaborating to provide training for road crews on the best management practices for handling invasives. Participants will be trained in field identification and how to avoid spreading invasive species. Hosted by VT local roads. Contact 802-654-2652 or scollopy@smcvt.org.

June 24, Manchester
July 22, Ferrisburgh
Aug. 26, Richmond

Managing Invasive Plants on Your Forest land: Learn how to identify, set priorities for and control invasive plants. The workshop is designed for forest owners and land managers. Contact Nate Fice, 802-779-1479. Sponsored by Coverts, Bennington Natural Resource Conservation District and VT. Dept of Forest, Parks and Recreation.
June 30: 9 – 3:30; Hildene, Manchester.

On the Net:

<http://vtinvasiveplants.org> –
<http://tncinvasives.ucdavis.edu> --
www.newenglandwildflower.org
<http://bccdvt.org>
<http://www.ipane.org>
<http://www.beplantwise.org>

Kathy Doyle is a freelance ecologist and educator who lives in Middletown Springs. She can be reached at doylek@greenmtn.edu.

