



## INVASIVE PLANTS: THREATS TO YOUR LANDSCAPE

By

William Seaman and Joseph Standaert

Planting the wrong plant in the wrong place can have consequences! This fact sheet covers some of the issues associated with introducing a species from a faraway area and what can go wrong locally if that plant is “invasive” and disrupts natural ecosystems and their native habitats, flora and fauna. The recommended, best landscaping practice is to always use the abundant variety of groundcovers, grasses, shrubs and trees adapted to our geographic area.

### What Is an Invasive Plant Species?

In general, plants that are not native often are referred to as being "alien," "exotic," and "introduced." According to the North Carolina Native Plant Society (NCNPS), the problem with non-native plants comes from a small but harmful group known as **invasive species**, defined as, “*Vigorous growers which are displacing our native plant and animal species.*” NCNPS notes that invasive species tend to “*have fast growth rates, high fruit production, rapid vegetative spread, and efficient seed dispersal and germination.*” Not being native to North Carolina they lack the natural herbivores and diseases that would naturally control them in their native habitats.

Introductions of plants from Europe and Asia into North America have been happening for centuries. The numerous examples of plant species that have stayed in their intended spots, and created much beauty in the landscape and bounty in agriculture include daylily, European columbine, beautyberry, and various ornamental trees. On the other hand, the invasive kudzu vine is infamous throughout the Southeast as a purposeful introduction (from Asia, 1876) that ran amuck. Pictures of invasive species of particular concern are below.



*Kudzu kills or degrades other plants by smothering them under a solid blanket of leaves, by girdling stems and trunks, by breaking branches, or even uprooting entire trees and shrubs through the sheer force of its weight. (Plant Conservation Alliance Photo)*

### Threats and Damages from Invasive Plants in Our Region

“*Biologists and other scientists now commonly refer to invasions by exotic plants as one of the most serious problems facing native plant and wildlife populations in the United States,*” as reported by North Carolina State University’s “Going Native” landscape program. Invasive, non-native plant species cause ecological and economic damages by (1) reducing the amount of light, water, nutrients and space available to native plant species, (2) crowding out native plants, which reduces the abundance and diversity of foods available to birds and other wildlife, (3) harboring plant pathogens that can affect both native and non-native plants, including ornamentals, (4) disrupting native plant-pollinator relationships, (5) increasing soil erosion along stream banks and roadsides, (6) lethal girdling of trees and shrubs, (7) hybridizing with related native species to change a population's genetic makeup, (8) releasing toxins that may be injurious

or lethal to wildlife and humans, (9) reducing establishment of native tree and shrub seedlings, (10) altering natural wildfire regimes, and (11) competing with and replacing rare and endangered species and encroaching upon their limited habitat.

### Recognizing Some Especially Troublesome Invasive Plants

These species are among 25 that are listed in Buncombe County's invasive species zoning ordinance. The list is provided as Montreat Landcare Fact Sheet # 4.



*Tree-of-Heaven can grow 10 to 14 feet the first year. It is shade and flood intolerant, and few wildlife species use it.*  
(NCSU text and photo)



*Japanese knotweed commonly invades disturbed areas with high light, such as roadsides and stream banks. Dense patches shade and displace other plants and reduce wildlife habitat.*

*English Ivy serves as a reservoir for bacterial leaf scorch that infects maples, oaks, and elms. Very few species of wildlife use English Ivy because it is mildly toxic.*  
(NCSU text and photo)



### Plant This! Not That!—More Information on Native and Invasive Plant Species

There is growing interest and use of native plants by homeowners, landscape architects and other stakeholders. Furthermore, NCSU recommends that, “*When at all possible, these plants [invasives] should be removed from the landscape and replaced with native plants.*” These sources of information can help beginners and experts alike in selecting plants. Also, see Montreat Landcare Fact Sheets #1 and #3 concerning native plants for this area.

- √ North Carolina Native Plant Society, <http://www.ncwildflower.org/index.php> (includes Native Plant Habitat Certification Program application); NCNPS has a chapter in Asheville
- √ North Carolina State University, Going Native: Urban Landscaping for Wildlife with Native Plants, <http://www.ncsu.edu/goingnative/index.html>
- √ Invasive Plant Atlas of the United States, <http://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/index.html>
- √ Plant Conservation Alliance, <http://www.nps.gov/plants/index.htm>
- √ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service field guide to invasives, [http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/gtr/gtr\\_srs062/](http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/gtr/gtr_srs062/)

### What Is Montreat Landcare?

A Landcare group is a community-based group of volunteers working on conservation projects that contribute to positive environmental, social and economic outcomes. Montreat Landcare, the first in North Carolina, organizes projects to protect, to preserve, and to present the natural features of our cove. It is made up of representatives from organizations that are active in stewardship of the environment. See the Landcare website <http://montreatlandcare.org/>, or call 828-669-8002 for more information.