

## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH INVASIVE PLANTS?

Legions of alien invaders are silently creeping into the United States and taking over our native plants, animals, and landscapes at an alarming rate. Does this sound like a plot lifted from Star Trek or Battlestar Galactica? Unfortunately, the story is not science fiction. Invasive weeds are taking over public lands at an estimated rate of 4,600 acres a day! With growth like this, it's not surprising that invasive species are the second greatest threat to the biological diversity and natural ecosystems of the United States, after direct habitat destruction. So, to say that a war is being waged against invasive alien plant and animal species across the U.S. is no exaggeration!

Approximately 4,000 species of exotic plants and 500 exotic animals have established free-living populations in the U.S. Nearly 700 are known to cause severe harm to agriculture at a cost of billions of dollars annually. Over 1,000 exotic plant species have been identified as a threat to natural areas, harming our native flora and fauna as a result of their aggressive, invasive characteristics.

The challenge is to remove existing infestations and prevent the spread of invasive plants to non-infested areas. Everyone can make a big difference by getting involved! You can learn to identify invasive plants, take care not to spread them, report them when found, and enlist the help of others in the community. The Alien Plant Working Group is part of the global effort to spread information about invasive plants.

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/>



**LEFT:** Yellow star-thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) is a powerful invader. As it infests an area, it chokes out the native plants, reducing biodiversity and wildlife habitat and forage.

**COVER:** A tree trunk covered by the invasive English ivy (*Hedera helix*). As the ivy climbs in search of increased light, it engulfs and kills by blocking light from reaching the host tree's leaves.

### PLANT CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

The Plant Conservation Alliance (PCA) is a public-private partnership of groups that share the same goal: to protect native plants by ensuring that native plant populations and their communities are maintained, enhanced, and restored. PCA has a federal committee, a non-governmental organization committee and five working groups, including the Alien Plant Working Group.

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#### PCA Federal Members include:

Bureau of Land Management, Department of Defense, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Highway Administration, National Park Service, USDA Agricultural Research Service, USDA Forest Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey.

#### PCA's Cooperators include:

Over 260 botanical gardens, native plant societies, trade and professional associations, businesses, educational groups, nonprofits, landscape architects, local government and tribal agencies.

*PCA is the IUCN North American Plant Specialist Group*

**IUCN**

The World Conservation Union SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION



Plant Conservation Alliance

# ALIEN PLANT INVADERS



<http://www.nps.gov/plants>

## WHAT IS AN ALIEN INVASIVE PLANT?

Alien plants are those introduced by people into an area where they have never occurred before naturally. They are also known as exotic, non-indigenous, and non-native. Invasive plants are species that reproduce and spread rapidly, overwhelming and displacing existing native plants by reducing the availability of light, water, nutrients and space available.

Some invasive exotic species were planted intentionally for erosion control, livestock grazing, wildlife habitat enhancement, and/or ornamental purposes. Others have escaped from arboretums, botanical gardens, and our own backyards. Free from the complex array of natural controls present in their native lands, including herbivores, parasites, and diseases, exotic plants may experience rapid and unrestricted growth in novel environments.

## ALIEN PLANT WORKING GROUP

The Alien Plant Working Group (APWG) is a subcommittee of the Plant Conservation Alliance.

APWG's web-based project, Weeds Gone Wild: Alien Plant Invaders of Natural Areas, is a cooperative effort dedicated to educating homeowners, natural resource managers, and the general public on the threat posed by invasive exotic plants to the native ecosystems of the United States. Additional fact sheet authors and other volunteers are needed, please contact the Chair of APWG, Jil Swearingen (jil\_swearingen@nps.gov) for more information.



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*Is English ivy smothering your grass and trees and creeping towards your home? Is mile-a-minute weed marching over your wildflowers and threatening you with its devilish hooked spines? Are exotic bush honeysuckles consuming your native landscape? Scary? Yes, invasive plants are frightening! Where can you find information on how to stop these dangerous plants from taking over your world? Calm down. Help is just around the corner at the Weeds Gone Wild website. Volunteer expert-written fact sheets include photos, plant descriptions, ecological threat, U.S. distribution and habitat, biology and spread, management options, expert contacts, suggestions for native plants and non-invasive substitutes for landscaping, and references.*

The sixty plant invaders with fact sheets currently available on the site are:

- Annual bastard-cabbage (*Rapistrum rugosum*) • Amur corktree (*Phellodendron amurense*) • Asiatic colubrina (*Colubrina asiatica*) • Asiatic sand sedge (*Carex kobomugi*)
- Australian pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) • Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) • Black swallow-wort (*Cynanchum louiseae*) • Burma reed (*Neyraudia reynaudiana*)
- Bush honeysuckles, exotic (*Lonicera* cultivars and species) • Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) • Carrotwood (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*) • Chinese lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*)
- Climbing euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei*) • Cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) • Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) • Common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)
- Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) • English ivy (*Hedera helix*) • Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) • Fire tree (*Morella faya*)
- Fiveleaf akebia (*Akebia quinata*) • Fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) • Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) • Giant reed (*Arundo donax*) • Goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria*)
- Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) • Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) • Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) • Japanese spiraea (*Spiraea japonica*)
- Japanese stilt grass (*Microstegium vimineum*) • Kudzu (*Pueraria montana* var. *lobata*) • Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) • Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*)
- Melaleuca (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) • Mile-a-minute (*Polygonum perfoliatum*) • Multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) • Musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*)
- Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) • Pale swallow-wort (*Cynanchum rossicum*) • Paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) • Perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*)
- Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) • Princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) • Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) • Russian-olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)
- Salt cedar (*Tamarix* species) • Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) • Silk tree (*Albizia julibrissin*) • Smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) • Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea biebersteinii*)
- Strawberry guava (*Psidium cattleianum*) • Tall fescue (*Lolium arundinaceum*) • Tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) • Velvet tree (*Miconia calvescens*)
- West Indian marsh grass (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*) • White poplar (*Populus alba*) • Wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*) • Wisterias, exotic (*Wisteria floribunda* and *sinensis*)
- Yellow Himalayan raspberry (*Rubus ellipticus*) • Yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*)