

# What are Invasive Plants and Why They are a Problem

Invasive plants are bullies that push everything else aside. Invasive plants often come from foreign places where natural controls keep them in balance, but here without those controls they spread rapidly and choke out other plants. This can endanger the native plants that support the natural balance of our local web of life, which we cherish.

This handout shows some of the more common local invasive plants, although there are quite a few more. Not all such plants are from foreign lands. Poison ivy, for example, is a native that can take over in some places.

More information about invasive plants can be found here:

New England Wildflower Society – <http://www.newfs.org/protect/controlling-invasives>

Massachusetts Audubon - [http://www.massaudubon.org/Invasive\\_Species/](http://www.massaudubon.org/Invasive_Species/)

Invasive Plant Atlas of New England - <http://www.eddmaps.org/ipane/>

Mass. Assoc. of Conservation Commissions - [http://maccweb.org/resources\\_invasive.html](http://maccweb.org/resources_invasive.html)

## How to manage invasive plants

The most effective way generally is to remove the entire plant including the roots. Cutting is also effective, but may need to be repeated. Herbicides can also be used but may affect neighboring plants. For some plants cutting followed by applying herbicide to the cut stem can be most effective.

### Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)

Native to Europe, garlic mustard was first reported on Long Island in 1868, probably introduced via kitchen gardens. It is primarily a woodland plant and readily displaces all other understory growth.

A biennial with seeds sprouting in the spring, it forms dark green rosettes of heart-shaped, toothed leaves the first year, and stalks topped with clusters of white, cruciform flowers the second spring. When crushed, the plants smell strongly of garlic.

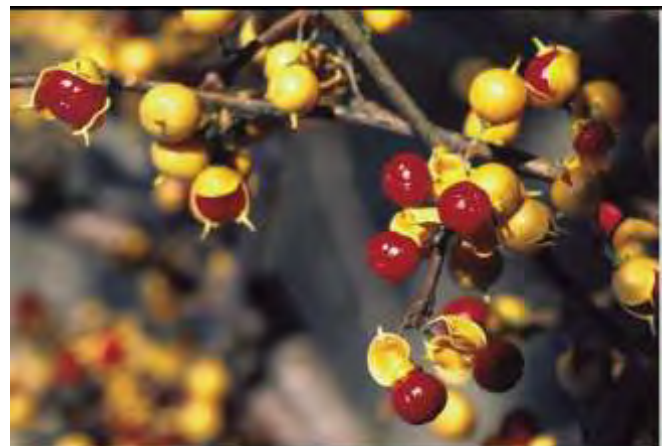
Control: Best removed by hand in the early spring before they go to seed.



### Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)

This twining woody vine, native to Japan, Korea, and China. Oriental bittersweet can grow to 60 feet, reaching the tops of mature trees, and strangling trees, shrubs, and other vines as it goes. In autumn, the yellow fruits split to reveal bright red seed coverings (arils). Animals disperse the seeds, and humans use the vines to make ornamental wreaths and swags, which quickly sprout on the trash heap. Cut stems resprout vigorously, making control difficult.

Control: Cut, cut, cut. Can apply herbicide to the cut stems.



### Japanese knotweed

(*Fallopia japonica* [*Polygonum cuspidatum*])

This fall-blooming, herbaceous perennial can reach ten feet on hollow stems that resemble bamboo. Tolerant of difficult conditions, it forms large, dense colonies that are extremely difficult to control. Japanese knotweed spreads primarily by rhizomes (underground stems), as the canes die off and fall to the ground, they create a thick layer of mulch suppressing all other plants. This, in combination with its early emergence, quick growth, and the dense shade cast by the large leaves, makes this species a major threat to native plant communities.



Control: Persistent (monthly) cutting and removal of plant material.

### Swallowworts, black and pale or red

(*Cynanchum louiseae* [*C. nigrum*], *C. rossicum*)

These herbaceous, twining vines in the Dogbane family form dense colonies that are almost impossible to eradicate, breaking apart when dug up. Black swallowwort has dark purple flowers with triangular petals, while pale or red swallowwort has pale-purple to yellowish flowers and petals almost twice as long as they are wide. Cutting off the flowers only delays the maturing of fruits, which cast seeds to the wind from seedpods that are similar to the pods of milkweeds, which are their close relatives.



Control: Persistent cutting and/or herbicide.

## How to Dispose of Invasive Plants in Arlington

You may find invasive plants on your property and want to remove them to allow other things to grow. You can collect and dispose of them in a covered pile in a corner of your property, but should not put them into your regular compost pile. You can however put them out with the trash pickup following these rules:

- **Do Not put them in the regular yard waste as that is composted and the seeds or roots may return when the compost is used in our parks and gardens.**
- **Small amounts can be put in with the regular household trash in black plastic bags.**
- **Larger amounts may be put in plastic bags labeled “WEEDS”. Stickers are available from DPW.**

For more information about disposal contact Charlotte Milan the Recycling Coordinator at DPW: [CMilan@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:CMilan@town.arlington.ma.us) or 781-316-3108.

Prepared by the Arlington Conservation Commission for September 2013 Town Day.

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