

Woody Invasive Species

Look into the woods of Michigan and you can find it teeming with lush greenery. However, not everything you see is harmless. You are very likely to find invasive species, which are species that are not native to the area, and can cause environmental, economic, or human harm. Invasive species are sadly a common sight in Michigan forests, and can range from microbes to full-sized trees. In Southwest Michigan, forest landowners are commonly plagued by three invasive species: Autumn Olive, Oriental Bittersweet, and Multiflora Rose. Our friends at the Woody Invasives of the Great Lakes Collaborative (WIGL) have provided some great insight onto why these species are such a problem, and what we can do about them!

Focusing in on these "Big Three", Autumn Olive is an invasive shrub that grows extremely fast in open areas. Autumn Olive is found naturally in Northern Asia and Eastern Europe, but was brought here for its supposed benefits for building up habitat for Michigan wildlife. It was recommended by local and state agencies until its aggressive and invasive qualities became clear. Autumn Olive is a nitrogen fixer, similar to soybeans and clover, and so it can alter the soil it grows in to help it grow even faster. This quality, combined with its robust root system, vigorous sprouting after cuts, and prolific seeds, makes it spread out of control when it is introduced to an area. WIGL's recommended treatment for this nasty shrub is to hand-pull new seedlings as soon as possible, and to apply herbicide to the stumps of larger shrubs after cutting them in the late summer or fall. This shrub is tough, so it may need multiple years of this "cut-stump" treatment.

Oriental Bittersweet is an invasive vine, brought in for very different reasons than Autumn Olive. This twining or "strangling" vine has very showy flowers and fruits, can grow to great heights, and requires little to no maintenance to survive, making it a popular choice in landscaping. Unfortunately, these very same qualities make it a horrible nuisance in the woods. Oriental Bittersweet can grow thicker than four inches in diameter, and up to sixty feet long, making them heavy enough to break tree limbs and wide enough to girdle full sized trees. Another threat that these vines pose is a genetic risk to the native American Bittersweet. The two species can make hybrids, which can make the competition for resources in the forest even worse. This pesky vine is near impossible to control by physical removal when they are already abundant, according to WIGL. However, foliar treatments or stem injections with herbicide are effective. Spraying the leaves of new growth after cutting the previous year is often the most effective treatment.

Last but not least is another invasive shrub, Multiflora Rose. This shrub is native to Japan and Korea, and was introduced to other countries as a form of erosion control near roadsides and wildlife forage, as well as rootstock for other rose species. The problems with this invasive species, aside from the obvious and vicious thorns, are the amount of their seeds, and how long they can remain viable. The plentiful seeds are easily spread by birds who eat the fruit and "deposit" the seed elsewhere, and the seeds themselves can remain viable for ten to twenty years. WIGL's advice shows that smaller plants can be dug out, but you must be sure to remove all of the roots to avoid new sprouting. Repeated mowing can also reduce populations, but requires constant effort over the growing seasons for multiple years. Spraying the leaves with herbicide is the most feasible for large groups of Multiflora Rose, whether as a stand-alone practice or alongside the repeated mowing.

Looking into the woods and seeing what needs to be done to control invasive species can be daunting, but it can be reassuring to know that there are known methods to manage them effectively. It may take a little work, but you can make an impact on your local community by taking the right steps. WIGL provides great insight into these practices, and their information is freely available to the public at their website: www.woodyinvasives.org. If you have questions about what is going on in your woods, and what options you may have, the Michigan Conservation Districts have a local forester on staff who can help you! District Forester Ben Savoie provides site assessments at no cost to landowners in Barry, Allegan, and Ottawa counties. Give Ben a call at 269-908-4134, or send an email to ben.savoie@macd.org to set up your free visit.



This Month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 11

Site Visit Acreage - 593

Private Sector Referrals - 10

Public Sector Referrals - 7

QFP Verifications - 4

QFP Acreage - 216

Outreach Events - 1

Media Occurrences - 4

Tree Farm Inspectors

Please let me know if you have not had a tree farm inspection this year, or would like to do more! We have many optional inspections in Southwest Michigan that can be done this year still

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