Homeowners: Avoid invasive plants

Invasive plants are a common problem whether you live in town or in the country. In some situations, a homeowner or farmer may have inadvertently planted them for wildlife cover or they like the look of the plant or flower.

Invasive plants are non-native plants that reproduce and spread quickly, often choking out native and more desirable plants. Since they are non-native, very few local insects and animals feed on them, allowing their populations to explode.

An invasive plant list may vary among conservation and nature organizations. However, the Ohio Department of Agriculture has a specific list of invasive plants that cannot be sold or distributed in Ohio. The list contains 38 plants: http://www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/Plant/Forms/InvasivePlantsNewsletter.pdf.

One plant, the callery pear, has been given a grace period for sales until 2023 so nurseries have time to transition to a different plant. Callery is an ornamental pear that includes the cultivar variants named Aristo, Autumn Blaze, Bradford, Cleveland Select and Redspire. These are common pears grown in our area.

There is not enough space in this article to discuss all 38 plants on the list. Following is a discussion of three species on the list: kudzu, oriental bittersweet and Japanese knotweed.

Kudzu is an invasive that you may commonly see traveling to the Southeast. It was introduced to the United States in 1876 at the Philadelphia Exposition. In the 1930s it was widely planted for erosion control. The plant soon got out of control.

Kudzu can cover buildings, barns, houses, and parked vehicles. It covers trees and power lines, often breaking them with the weight of the vines. Under ideal conditions, vines can grow 1 foot per day and up to 100 feet in a year. A single crown can produce as many as 30 new vines that expand out in all directions.

Kudzu is a semi-woody perennial vine in the pea family. Leaves consist of three broad-shaped leaflets that may or may not have two to three lobes. Plants spread by runners or by seed.

While this plant is well established in the South, it was thought that cold winters would prevent Kudzu from living in Ohio. However, it has become established as far north as Cleveland.

Oriental bittersweet is another invasive vining plant that is more prevalent in Ohio. This non-native plant is being found in woods, fencerows, gardens and yards. It is often called the Kudzu of the North.

Oriental bittersweet is native to China, Japan and Korea. It was introduced to the United States as an ornamental plant around 1890. This deciduous, woody, twining vine can climb on trees, shrubs and anything else in its way.

People liked this plant for its bright red and orange fruits, which gardeners would use for natural decorations. These decorations could also cause a potential movement of seeds to new locations.

The vines can grow on almost anything and will tightly twist around other plants, girdling their support system.

Leaves are glossy and finely toothed. Leaves may vary in shape, but most are round. Stems are light brown with white pith. Roots are bright orange in color.

Oriental bittersweet may be confused with the native American bittersweet. The leaf shape is more elliptical for American bittersweet compared with the round shape of the Oriental species. Fruit of the American species is in clusters at the end of branches. Oriental species has fruit along the stem.

Gardeners liked Japanese knotweed because of its tall and bamboo-like features. It was introduced as an ornamental in the late 1800s and soon escaped from gardens. Stems are hollow and upright and may reach a height of 10 feet. Stems are covered with purple specks and a white coating that can be rubbed off.

Japanese knotweed is a semi-woody perennial that can form dense stands from underground stems called rhizomes that spread out 60 feet. Any rhizome fragment can start a new stand. Fragments can be moved to new areas by streams, mowing equipment, or fill dirt. The plant also spreads by windborne seed.

The roots or rhizomes may release a toxic compound that may stunt other plant species, allowing knotweed to dominate an area. Knotweed leaves are triangular.

Homeowners should not introduce these three species discussed or any of the plants on the invasive list. Once established in an area, they are difficult to remove. Other plants on the list that are found in our area include tree-of-heaven, common teasel, autumn olive, multiflora rose, purple loosestrife, and various honeysuckle species.

Images and more information on kudzu, oriental bittersweet and Japanese knotweed may be found at the following sites:

Kudzu: https://bygl.osu.edu/node/974

Oriental bittersweet: https://bygl.osu.edu/node/980

Japanese knotweed: https://bygl.osu.edu/node/978

Update from last week’s column: The Department of Transportation has issued a second 90-day waiver of the Electronic Logging Device Rule for agricultural-related trucking. The waiver has been given to allow further clarification of the 150-air mile and personal conveyance exemptions. The waiver will end the latter part of June.

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