

News Article

By: John E. Woodmansee, Extension Educator, Agriculture/Natural Resources
E-mail: jwoodman@purdue.edu Phone: 260-244-7615 Web: www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley
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Invasive Species Challenge Ecosystems

National invasive species awareness week is Feb. 24-28. Just what is all the hubbub about invasive species?

Invasive insects, plants and other organisms are challenging our local ecosystems by out-competing or decimating native populations. This impacts native plants, insects, birds, fish and wildlife. And, subsequently it impacts everyone who wishes to better manage, enjoy and appreciate natural areas. Invasive insects and diseases have also attacked agricultural, forest and horticultural crops, causing economic damage. (Some are present in the U.S., but have not made their way to Indiana yet; e.g. spotted lanternfly).

Purdue Extension has long had helpful information about invasive species in various locations across our system. In a new effort to centralize our efforts into a “one-stop shop”, visit the recently launched “Report Invasive Species” website at <https://ag.purdue.edu/reportinvasive/>. And, let me know what you think about it. I can offer feedback on ways to improve the website, or express what you like about it.

It’s important to note that not all non-native species are bad – some behave themselves just fine in our environment.

For species that don’t behave, local residents can report invasive species by calling the Invasive Species hotline at 1-866-NO-EXOTIC (1-866-663-9684) or using the free Great Lakes Early Detection Network smartphone app, which can be downloaded on iTunes or GooglePlay. Purdue has put together a YouTube video to demonstrate how easily the app can be used to alert authorities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFvaweR4cSw>. You can also email DEPP@dnr.in.gov.

If you are one who manages or enjoys natural areas, I encourage you to become more aware and knowledgeable of invasive species, and to identify steps you can take to minimize their impact on ecosystems. Here are a few tips:

- Clean hiking boots, waders, boats and trailers, off-road vehicles and other gear to stop invasive species from hitching a ride to a new location.
- Avoid dumping aquariums or live bait into waterways.
- Don’t move firewood – instead, buy it where you’ll burn it, or gather on site when permitted.
- Plant only non-invasive plants in your garden and landscape, and remove any known invaders. This does not mean everything has to be native, but it should not be invasive.

- Report new or expanded invasive species outbreaks to authorities.

One thing we've done at the Purdue Extension office in Columbia City is to cut down the callery pear trees in front of our office. Callery pear is a species of concern because it produces fruit that is consumed by birds and deposited (with fertilizer) into natural areas. Once established, the trees can form thickets and inhibit regeneration of oaks and other native species. So, even though they are pretty trees to look at in the spring, we felt the responsible thing to do was to remove them.

For more information on invasive species, see websites below:

- Indiana Department of Natural Resources:
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/3123.htm>
- Indiana Native Plant Society:
<https://indiananativeplants.org/>
- Midwest Invasive Plant Network:
<http://www.mipn.org/>
- National Invasive Species Awareness Week:
<https://www.nisaw.org/>

For more information on invasive plant species in forest habitats, access the Purdue publication FNR-230-W, *Invasive Plant Species in Hardwood Tree Plantations*, at www.edustore.purdue.edu.