

Invasive Plant Species

The arrival of spring and the emergence of leaves and flowers is a welcome break from the bleakness of winter. Yet some of those same beautiful green leaves and colourful flowers conceal a very dark secret - they are invasive plants that are replacing native species and degrading biodiversity in many Island ecosystems.

One particularly nasty newcomer is the Glossy Buckthorn (*Rhamnus Frangula*). A European species, this medium-sized shrub has been planted on lawns and gardens across the Island for decades. On open, sunny sites glossy buckthorn will germinate and grow very quickly producing seeds as little as three years later. Seeds and root sprouts will quickly spring up in any open area, resulting in dense thickets that shade out even the hardiest of native trees and plants and leaves the ground underneath empty and barren. Many birds enjoy its plentiful berries (which are toxic to most mammals including people) and deposit the seeds in forests and hedges on their travels

In addition to its impacts on the natural environment, buckthorns are also a problem for the agricultural community. Glossy buckthorn is an alternate host for oat rust, a fungal disease that harms oat crops, and for the soybean aphid that can effect soybean yields.

Native to western North America, Wild Cucumber vine (*Echinocystis lobata*) has become a problem species on PEI, particularly in eastern Prince County. This species gets its name from its prickly, green seed pods that resemble small cucumbers. Wild Cucumber vines will grow on a variety of moist, sunny sites but it requires some support as it grows. Often it will climb along fence lines and up over tall grasses and small trees and over time it creates a dense carpet that shades out the vegetation underneath.

Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) originated in Asia and reaches about 3- 4m in height on PEI. It forms dense thickets wherever it grows and will quickly dominate an area, killing other herbaceous plants. Its root system is strong enough to damage building foundations, water impoundments, sidewalks and roads and many other important structures. In riparian zones, it can also reduce the water carrying capacity small streams. For these and other reasons, it is listed as one of the world's top 100 invasive plant species.

Today, dense thickets of these plants can be found in many Island communities. Wherever they grow, they out-compete most native plants and create "biological deserts" that offer little habitat for other plants and animals.

Control methods are often time consuming and expensive but the best method is always to avoid planting them and to quickly weed them out when new sites are found. For more information on these and other invasive species visit: www.invasivespecies.gc.ca