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## **Invasives: Stop the Spread**

*by Grant Sork, Natural Resource Conservation Service (3<sup>rd</sup> article in a 4 part series)*

You can help stop the introduction and spread of invasive species. Help protect native plants and animals by following these six easy guidelines:

- Make sure that the plants you are buying for your yard or garden are not invasive. Replace invasive species in your garden with non-invasive alternatives. Ask your local conservation district for help in identifying invasive plants.
- When boating, clean your boat thoroughly before transporting it to a different body of water. Also be sure to check your camper or motor home for gypsy moth cocoons and egg masses before traveling to a different location.
- Clean your boots before you hike in a new area to get rid of hitchhiking weed seeds and pathogens.
- Don't "pack a pest" when traveling. Fruits and vegetables, plants, insects and animals can carry pests or become invasive themselves. **Don't move firewood.** It can harbor forest pests like emerald ash borer. Throw out food before you travel from place to place.
- Don't release aquarium fish/plants, live bait, or other exotic animals into the wild. If you plan to own an exotic pet, do your research and plan ahead to make sure you can commit to looking after it.
- Volunteer at your local park, refuge or other wildlife area to help remove invasive species. Help educate others about the threat.

Some of the common invasive species in this area that started as yard and garden plants are:

**Purple Loosestrife** is also known as the "purple plague." Purple loosestrife is an ornamental plant known for its purple/pink-spiked flowers. Once limited to gardens in the Northeast, it now chokes wetlands across the country.

**Multiflora Rose** (also called rambler rose) is a thorny, perennial shrub with clusters of fragrant white-to-pink flowers that bloom in May or June. Small, bright red rose hips develop during the summer. It is often found on the edges of farms and along highways.

**Tree of Heaven** is a Chinese tree also known as ailanthus, Chinese sumac and stinking sumac. The Tree of Heaven is a rapidly growing deciduous tree with pale gray bark, light brown twigs and large compound leaves. It can flourish in unfavorable conditions with little care, and was a common stock in nurseries across the country as early as the 1840's.

**Autumn Olive** is an invasive species that out-competes and displaces native plants by creating a dense shade that hinders the growth of plants that need lots of sun. It can produce up to 200,000 seeds each year, and can spread over a variety of habitats as its nitrogen-fixing root nodules allow the plant to grow in even the most unfavorable soils. Not to mention that it reproduces quickly and with little effort at all. Birds are quite attracted to the seeds, and will scatter them throughout pastures, along roadsides and near fences.

For more information:

The Nature Conservancy - <http://www.nature.org/initiatives/invasivespecies/>

Much of the information for this article was found on this site.

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers - <http://www.protectyourwaters.net/>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - <http://www.fws.gov/INVASIVES/what-you-can-do.html>

Michigan Invasive Species Information Network - <http://www.misin.msu.edu/>