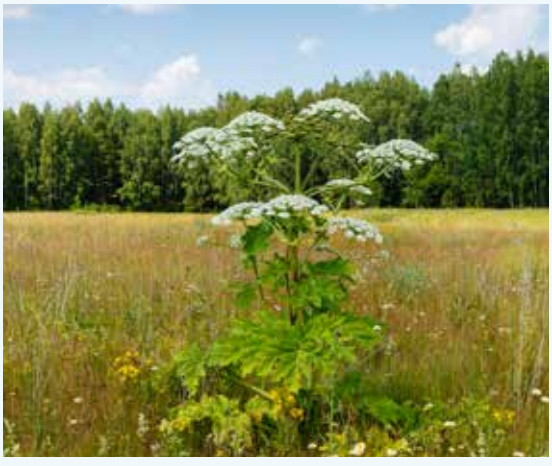
managing invasive plants in your landscape

Pond invaded by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*).

What are invasive plants?

An invasive plant species is one that grows and spreads quickly because it can adapt to a variety of growing conditions. They are usually non-native (which means that it has been introduced from another geographic area), and lack the environmental conditions that control their population.

There are many non-native species that coexist with native plant communities. However, problems can arise when a non-native species suppress the native vegetation and takes over an area, creating a mono-culture. This is when a plant species becomes ”invasive”. Invasive species exist among all groups of living things, including fish, mammals, insects, fungus and plants.



Giant Hogweed is an invasive plant that produces a noxious sap that makes the skin more sensitive to ultraviolet light. This is known as photosensitivity, which can result in severe and painful burning and blistering. It is important to avoid any skin contact with this plant. If you are exposed to the sap protect the area from the sun for at least 48 hours.

The spread

The spread of invasive species often involves a human component. For example, throughout the colonization of North America, plants were intentionally brought from other continents for food, medicine and as ornamental plants.

More recently, plants have been imported for landscaping, agriculture and restoration, and some have proved problematic due to their aggressive nature caused by:

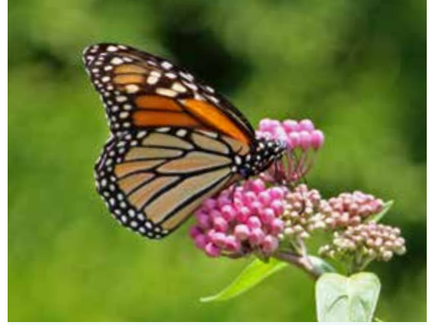
- High annual seed production and rapid development of large colonies
- Tolerance to a wide range of growing conditions
- Ability to spread quickly by roots and re-sprout after disturbance
- Absence of natural predators or competition from native plants
- Dispersion by wind, water or the movement of soil

How does it affect you?

Invasive plants have the ability to displace native plant species, which reduces biodiversity. Wildlife, such as insects and birds, are dependent on native plants for food and habitat. When native plant species are displaced, the invasive plants that replace them, often do not provide the same quality of food and habitat for wildlife. An example is the Monarch caterpillar, which consume only plants from the milkweed family.

Invasive species not only impact natural areas but also affect other areas of our life.

- Lower yields for farmers and increased herbicide use with an economic impact of 2.2 billion. (CFIA, 2019)
- Requires resources which could be used for other initiatives to combat invasive species. $20 billion impact on forestry sector each year. (CFIA, 2019)
- Some plants, such as Giant Hogweed, can cause severe skin reactions and other plants can increase motor vehicle accident risks by obstructing roadside visibility.



Monarch Butterfly on Milkweed

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is a term used to describe the number and variety of organisms found within a geographic region. Ecosystems that have a wide variety of plants and animals tend to be healthier than those with lower biodiversity. Healthy ecosystems are dynamic and able to adapt more easily to changing conditions.

Invasive plants to watch for and manage

HERBACEOUS

	Species	Issue	DIY Removal	Years to Manage*
	Periwinkle	Hardy and tolerant of most conditions. Creeps into forest undergrowth and creates large mono-cultures. Can hinder growth of garden plants.	Minimal effort to pull and remove roots. Large patches are easily controlled with herbicide applied by a contractor.	2+ years
	English Ivy	Hardy and tolerant of most conditions. Creeps into forest undergrowth and creates large mono-cultures. Can hinder growth of garden plants.	Minimal effort to pull. Large patches are easily controlled with herbicide by a contractor.	1–2 years
 Photo: Richard Gardner	Common Reed *(Phragmites)*	Grows in sunny, moist conditions. Salt tolerant, spreads through seeds and roots. Will create tall, dense mono-cultures in wetlands, stream banks and farm fields.	Spading, digging and tarping. Leave seed heads in garbage bag in sun for three weeks, then send to landfill. Large dense patches will require treatment with herbicides.	2–3 years
 Photo: Chris Evans	Garlic Mustard	Grows in dense patches in forest understory. Out-compete spring ephemerals and spreads aggressively each year.	Best to pull in April/May before going to seed. Large patches are easily controlled with herbicide applied by a contractor.	5+ years

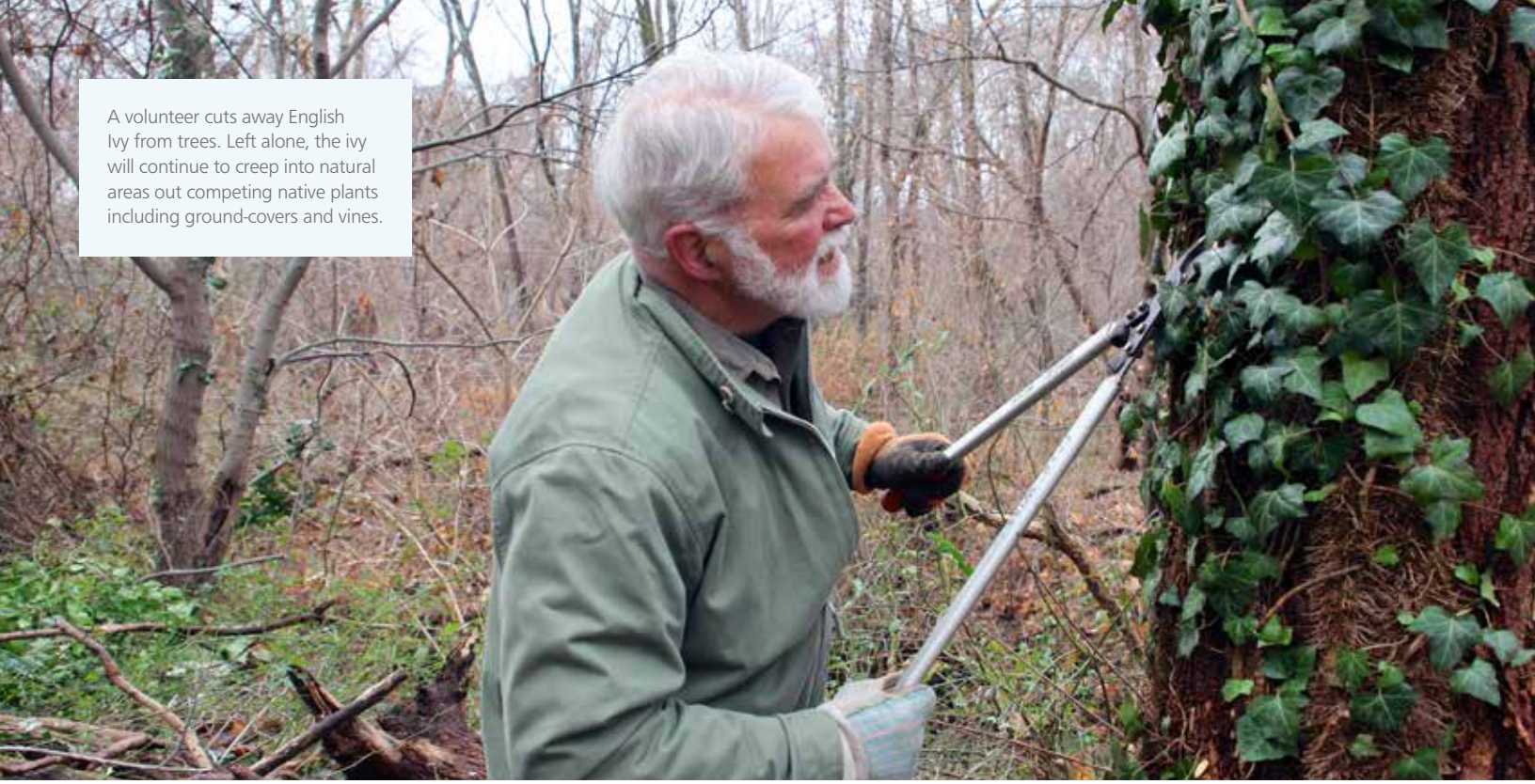
* Estimated number of years of treatment and removal until plant is eradicated from site

 Photo: Terry English	Giant Hogweed	Spreads down creeks and rivers. Can create dense and vast patches. Highly toxic to skin and eyes.	Do not remove yourself. Due to plant toxicity and size an experienced contractor should be contacted for removal.	3+ years
 Photo: Leslie J. Mehrhoff	Goutweed	Hardy and fast spreading. Can grow in sun or shade. Creates large mono-cultures. Can hinder growth of garden plants.	Minimal effort to pull. Large patches are easily controlled with herbicide applied by a contractor. Can be smothered or solarized with tarps.	3–5 years

TREES, SHRUBS AND VINES

	Species	Issue	DIY Removal	Years to Manage*
	White Mulberry Tree	Hybridizes with the native and endangered Red Mulberry tree. Spreads quickly in urban areas. Berries are dark purple and can be spread by birds.	Ensure tree is not a Red Mulberry. If small it can be uprooted by hand or with tools. If mature a contractor is recommended to treat and remove.	2–3 years
	Tree of Heaven	Spreads easily by seeds, grows rapidly. Threat to structures, wires and foundations.	Small ones can be pulled out with uprooter. Larger trees can be treated or removed by contractor.	2–3 years
 Photo: Richard Webb	Tartarian Honeysuckle	Spreads and becomes dense quickly. Out-competes native forest plants.	If small can uproot by hand or with tools. If mature a contractor is recommended.	5+ years
 Photo: Jan Samanek	Common Buckthorn	Birds eat the berries and spreads the seeds. Can grow anywhere but mostly found in forest understory where they grow a dense mono-culture and out-compete native plants.	Strong root establishment. Use uprooting tools, pulling tools or hire contractor for treatment/removal.	5+ years
	Japanese Knotweed	Fast growing. Very stubborn. Will break through pavement and other surfaces. Roots can reach up to three meters deep in soil. If eradication is needed in a shorter period of time; excavation is required.	Succulent stalks are easy to cut but VERY persistent. If excavation is required; use a contractor. This plant can sprout from shoots so dispose in landfill with care.	3+ years
 Photo: Chris Evans	Dog Strangling Vine	Grows in a variety of conditions. Will release chemicals into soil to prevent other plants from growing. Spreads through seeds quickly. Will create dense mono-culture in forests and fields. Threat to Monarch Butterfly.	Retrieve all roots with shovel while pulling. Larger stems and stands are best managed by a contractor with herbicide application. Leave pods in garbage bag in sun for three weeks and send to landfill.	3–5 years

* Estimated number of years of treatment and removal until plant is eradicated from site



A volunteer cuts away English Ivy from trees. Left alone, the ivy will continue to creep into natural areas out competing native plants including ground-covers and vines.

What can you do?

On your property

- Find out if you have invasive species on your property by attending workshops, using free resources, or having a Conservation Halton Landowner Outreach Technician visit your property.
- Remove and dispose of invasive plants based on the best management practices for each species.
- Plant native species that compete with non-native invasive plants and provide habitat for local wildlife.
- Purchase plants from native plant nurseries or from reputable plant sales and seed swaps in your community.

Your neighbourhood

- Become a volunteer with local environmental groups to assist with invasive plant removal.
- When walking or hiking in natural areas, stay on official trails and keep dogs on leash.
- Help track and report invasive plants through citizen science initiatives and mobile apps.
- Educate others about invasive species in your neighbourhood. The more people who know about the spread of invasive plants, the easier it will be to prevent.
- Ask your local nursery to stop selling invasive plants and ask them to sell native plants instead.

HOW TO REPORT

iNaturalist: inaturalist.org
Ontario Invading Species: info@invadingspecies.com
Early Detection and Rapid Response: edrrontario.ca

Conservation Halton

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2596 Britannia Road West, Burlington, Ontario L7P 0G3

Visit **conservationhalton.ca/stewardship** for links to Best Management Practices for invasive plant management.

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