

Invasive plants In West Central Missouri

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As gardeners and residents of west Central Missouri we enjoy a prairie based ecosystem that supports a variety of plant life that is growing richer and more diverse. Many decades ago, and during the intervening years as more and more people populated the area, they brought with them all sorts of plants: crops to feed people and their livestock, trees for boundaries and shade, and plants that were a joy to behold. In the beginning however the area was far from barren and had numerous native plant species. In point of fact there was, and still is, a robust variety of indigenous plants that carved out their particular niche and place in this West Central Missouri area. This environment seemed to welcome the new plant species with nitrogen, moisture, temperatures, and other attributes and advantages needed and used by the long-time resident plants. These newcomer plants, often very different species, and aggressive as only a plant can be aggressive, began to out compete some of the old timers. They grew in all sorts of places, they grew in places many other plants would not, they edged out other plants, and they even altered entire ecosystems. In short, they sometimes became a nuisance. These new plants, these outsiders, had become to many an “invasive” species of plant. How widespread is the matter in West Central Missouri? Some sources say there currently 489 different species of invasive plants. This is according to 29,776 recent documented observations that were separated into seven categories of invasive plants. That's a lot. These numbers are themselves in a flux for several reasons. The most obvious is that each year newly arrived invasive plants are observed. Not so obvious is that we don't always agree that a plant is invasive. In fact the term “invasive” is sometimes defined differently by different experts. For example, the scientist who may view invasive plants as non-indigenous plant species not belonging in a particular ecosystem, the gardening community who may view any plant they didn't plant as a noxious weed and something to be eradicated by pulling, spraying, or chopping, and local, state and national governments as a plant that has lost or does not have economic viability or other redeeming qualities. While each group's view is important our present interest is directed to our gardeners who may also have sometimes strong opinions of what an invasive plant is or is not.

Invasive plants can be a worldwide issue with many countries like England and New Zealand having strong anti-invasive plants rules. The United States has Executive Order 13112 (1999) that very pointedly addresses invasive plants. States such as Hawaii and others have particularly rigorous rules and guidelines regarding invasive plant species. Missouri has a list of invasive plants that gardeners are encouraged to avoid. A list of these common invasive plants that follows may surprise some gardeners. All of these plants can be found in West Central Missouri. A detailed and comprehensive list of Missouri invasive plants are provided in numerous sources provided by the Missouri Conservation Department (MCD) in pamphlets, on websites, and in Extension Offices located statewide. Here are some of the more common West Central Missouri invasive plants as reported on a MCD website: Autumn Olive, Bush Honeysuckle, Callery Pear (Bradford Pear), Canada Thistle, Chinese Yam, Common blackthorn, Crown Vetch, Common Cut leaved Teasel, Garlic Mustard, Japanese Honeysuckle, Japanese Hop, Japanese Knotweed, Japanese Stiggrass, Johnson Grass, Kudzu, Multiflora Rose, Musk Thistle, Purple Loosestrife, White and Yellow Sweet Clover, and Winter Creeper. These are but a few of current invasive plants. This same MCD website (<http://mdc.mo.gov>) also provides

recommendations for controlling the spread of invasive plants, their descriptions, and other relevant plant information.

Some gardeners viewing this previous list may say some of these invasive plants are really exotics. And, of course, this is correct. It seems that sometimes plants brought into the area from outside originally make their entrance as a prized exotic. The exotic plant turns into an invasive plant not at the stroke of midnight but rather when its presence begins to damage the ecosystem by pushing out plant and animal species indigenous to that area. By some means or another the once upon a time exotic escapes the confines of the garden and finds its way into a new habitat where it begins to replace current residents and in fact becomes invasive.

Invasive plants are all around us and various groups are expending considerable resources to control these plant hooligans before they cause more harm. Because prevention is better than a pound of cure, especially in the case of invasive plants, gardeners are major players in maintaining a healthy plant community.