Invasive Plants Threatening Illinois Habitats

The invasion of natural habitats by non-native or exotic plants poses a serious threat to Illinois natural ecosystems, second only to habitat destruction in importance. New invasive plants can harm our natural resources and biodiversity and directly impact the economies that rely upon those resources. See on the lookout... for these new invaders to Illinois and report any suspected findings.

Wetlands
Lakes, Streams, Rivers, Ponds, Sloughs, Bogs

Water Hyacinth
Eichhornia crassipes
This native of Brazil is considered one of the world’s most destructive aquatic weeds. It forms schools that clog navigation, destroy fish and wildlife habitat and outcompete native aquatic plants. Water Hyacinth has not yet been reported in Illinois.

Nysilla
Nysilla aquatica
This plant is an aquatic weed found in fresh, slow moving waters. It has floating leaves, ribbed purple stem and underwater flowers. Nysilla is considered a noxious weed of major concern in Illinois.

Alternanthera philoxeroides
This floating or emergent aquatic perennial can quickly spread to form large colonies by its rhizomes. It produces yellow capsules that open to expose red seeds.

Grasslands
Prairie, Roadside, Pasture, Fencelines, Right-of-Ways

Japanese Knotweed
Polygonum cuspidatum
This woody herb is considered one of the most harmful exotic species to herbaceous plants, soil composition and plant communities. It is very dangerous for most animals. Japanese Knotweed is considered a noxious weed of major concern in Illinois.

Japanese Hops
Humulus japonicus
This native of Asia is a semi-woody perennial that grows up to 3 ft wide toward the base. Most are found along roadsides and railroads. They produce oval shaped white or pink flowers in circular leafy structures called ‘ocreae’.

Mile-a-Minute Vine
Ctenis vellozerioides
Also known as Mile-a-Minute, this climbing vine is a close relative to the hops found in the world. It climbs over other plants using tendrils and can grow up to 60 ft tall. Though not yet widespread in the state, it is a semi-woody vine with large heart shaped leaves along a reddish brown stem with distinctly swollen nodes. Once it becomes established in an area it can quickly spread to form large colonies by its rhizomes.

Oriental Bittersweet
Celastrus orbiculatus
This vine degrades wetlands by foraging away the water. It has twining vine that is used to flavor beers throughout the world. It climbs over other plants using tendrils and can grow up to 3 ft wide toward the base. It is very dangerous for most animals. Oriental Bittersweet is considered a noxious weed of major concern in Illinois.

Agronomic
Row Crops, Orchards, Nurseries, Greenhouses

Alligator Weed
Alternanthera philoxeroides
This floating or emergent aquatic perennial can quickly spread to form large colonies by its rhizomes. It produces yellow capsules that open to expose red seeds.

Chinese Yam
Polygonum cuspidatum syn. Fallopia japonica
This plant is sometimes used as an ornamental groundcover in landscapes. It has large underground tubers. Its pendulous flower head attracts many pollinators. The plant sap, containing furocoumarins, comes to a boil. Furocoumarins are toxic chemicals. The poison that killed Socrates (399 B.C.) was made from this plant sap.

Sweet Potato Vine
Ipomoea batatas
A sprawling vine that is used to flavor beers throughout the world. It climbs over other plants using tendrils and can grow up to 3 ft wide toward the base. Though not yet widespread in the state, it is a semi-woody vine with large heart shaped leaves along a reddish brown stem.

Trees

Goldenrod
Solidago altissima
This European species quickly overtakes abundance and produces yellow capsules that open to expose red seeds.

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Purple Loosestrife invading a wetland habitat

If left unchecked...