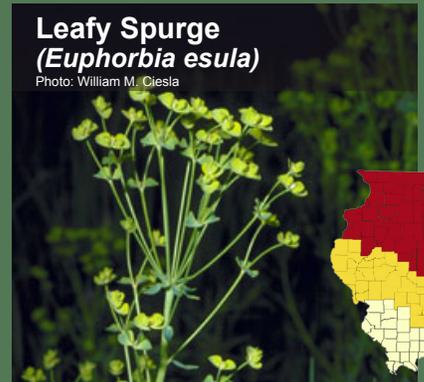
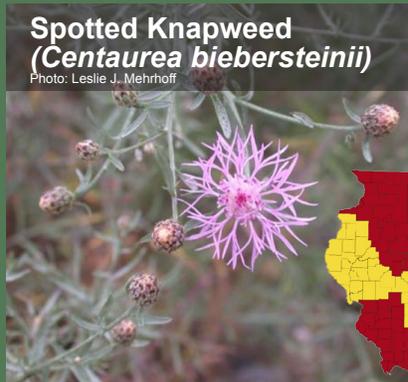


# EXOTIC, INVASIVE PLANTS IN ILLINOIS HABITATS

## GRASSLANDS: Prairies, Roadsides, Fencelines, Right-of-ways...



MAP KEY: ■ = Widespread ■ = Occasional / Rare ■ = Absent

For more information on invasive plants visit the Illinois CAPS website at:  
[www.inhs.uiuc.edu/research/CAPS/](http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/research/CAPS/)



# EXOTIC, INVASIVE PLANTS IN ILLINOIS GRASSLANDS

Illinois was once dominated by large continuous stretches of prairie throughout the state. Many of the plants that made up the prairies have since retreated to remnant pockets and along roadsides, railroads, and right-of-ways. These areas are continually invaded by new plants being sown or transported by humans, animals, and vehicles.

**Crown Vetch (*Coronilla varia*):** Perennial. **Native to:** Europe, Southeast Asia, and Northern Africa. **Distribution:** Found along roadways and waterways, but is invading prairies, pastures, woodland edges, and open areas. **ID Keys:** Herbaceous legume with creeping stems 2 to 6' long. Leaflets of 15 to 25 oblong leaves arranged alternately on stem. Flower clusters are pinkish-purple to white in color and are present from May through August. **Importance:** Fast establishment and rapid vegetative growth cause it to displace native vegetation.

**Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*):** Perennial. **Native to:** Japan, Korea, and Eastern China. **Distribution:** Found in fields, pastures, and roadsides. It also may occur in dense forests, particularly near disturbances such as treefall gaps. **ID Keys:** Thorny shrub with arching stems. Leaves are divided into 5 to 11 toothed leaflets with fringed stipules. White to pinkish flowers appear in May with red 'hips' that persist through winter. **Importance:** Grows aggressively and displaces native shrubs and herbs. Degrades habitat for wildlife and grazing areas.

**White and Yellow Sweet Clover (*Melilotus alba, M. officinalis*):** Biennial. **Native to:** Europe. **Distribution:** Along roadways, ditches, pastures, and open areas. **ID Keys:** Herbaceous plant that grows to be 3 to 5' tall in bush-like form. Three finely toothed leaflets are alternately arranged on the stem. First year plants do not flower. Second year plants produce fragrant yellow or white flowers in spring to early summer. **Importance:** Displaces native vegetation.

**Common and Cutleaf Teasel (*Dipsacus syvestris, D. laciniatus*):** Biennial. **Native to:** Europe. **Distribution:** Found along roadsides and disturbed areas. **ID Keys:** Grows as a basal rosette for first year then sends up a tall flowering stalk 6 to 7' tall. Rosette leaves are oval to oblong and quite hairy. Flowering plants have large, oblong, opposite, sessile leaves that are prickly, stems also are prickly. Flowers are small and packed into dense oval-shaped heads with white or purple flower clusters. **Importance:** Lack of natural enemies allows teasel to proliferate. Teasel can quickly form large monocultures excluding all native vegetation.

**Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*):** Perennial. **Native to:** central and eastern Europe, western Asia. **Distribution:** Prairies, rangeland, pastures, along streams and open woodlands. **ID Keys:** Herbaceous plant that exudes milky sap. Leaves are alternate, opposite, and/or whorled around stem. Leaves are lance shaped and are 3/4 to 2 3/4" long and 1/10 to 1/5" wide with smooth margins. Greenish-yellow clusters of flowers are at the ends of most branches and stems. **Importance:** *Federal Noxious Weed*. Roots exude allelochemicals that deter the growth of other plants, decreasing plant diversity. The plants also produce a milky sap that irritates animals and is poisonous to most livestock. May also cause a rash on humans.

**Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*):** Perennial. **Native to:** Europe. **Distribution:** In riparian areas, flood plains, and ditches. Prefers moist, well-drained soil. **ID Keys:** Grass that reaches 12' tall that spreads via rhizomes and stolons. Leaf blades are 3/4 to 3" wide, hairy, long, and taper near stem. **Importance:** Crowds out native species, diminishes habitats for wildlife, and increases flooding due to water impediment.

**Spotted Knapweed (*Centaurea biebersteinii*):** Biennial. **Native to:** Europe. **Distribution:** Pastures and rangeland, establishes readily on disturbed ground. **ID Keys:** Leaves of first year rosette compound with irregular lobes. Leaves are 2 to 6" long, alternately arranged, hairy, and have translucent dots. Lower leaves are divided, while upper leaves are not. Purplish disc flowers. **Importance:** Drought tolerant due to deep taproot which also aids in increasing erosion, surface runoff, and stream sedimentation. Produces allelochemicals (catechins) that remain in the soil, making restoration difficult.

**Reed Canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*):** Perennial. **Native to:** Eurasia and Northwestern United States. **Distribution:** Wetlands including marshes, wet prairies, wet meadows, fens, stream banks, and swales. **ID Keys:** Grass that grows 2 to 6' tall. Erect, hairless stems with leaf blades are 1/4 to 1/3" wide, gradually tapering, up to 10" long. It has a transparent ligule (a membrane where blade and sheath meet). Densely clustered green to purple changing to beige flowers from May to mid-June. **Importance:** Outcompetes native species by forming dense stands. Invasion associated with disturbance. It has been planted widely for forage and for erosion control. Foreign genotypes out-compete native ones.

**Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*):** Perennial. **Native to:** Caucasus Mountains between Europe and Asia. **Distribution:** Rich moist soils of flood plains and streambanks. **ID Keys:** Herbaceous plant reaching 8 to 15' tall. Hollow stems that are 2 to 4" diameter with purple blotches and coarse white hairs that encircle the stem at the base of the leaf. Leaves are lobed and deeply incised and can reach 5' in diameter. Large umbrella shaped flower clusters. **Importance:** *Federal Noxious Weed*. Outcompetes native vegetation and causes increased erosion along streambanks; most importantly causes severe skin irritation upon contact.

**Sericea Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*):** Perennial. **Native to:** Eastern Asia. **Distribution:** Found along roadsides and in disturbed open areas, in addition to borders of ponds, swamps, and meadows. **ID Keys:** Legume with herbaceous to woody stems which reach 3 to 6' tall. Erect leafy branches that are ashy to green in color. Leaves are compound and composed of three leaflets. Creamy yellow flowers are present from late July through October. **Importance:** Invades and displaces native vegetation. Unpalatable to livestock.

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Invasive plants have the ability to thrive and spread aggressively outside of their natural range. While some invasive plants tend to be more aggressive than others, it remains equally important to be able to correctly identify and manage the invasive plant before it begins to cause damage to the ecosystem, humans, or animals.

**What can you do?** Prevent establishment of invasive plants by using only native or non-invasive plants in the landscape. Learn to identify locally important invasive plants. Once they are identified, you can proceed by determining the best strategy for removal. Not all plants can be removed the same way, so be sure to ask questions on how to specifically remove the invasive plants you have. Replace the invasive plants with non-invasive and native plants to prevent re-establishment. Increased awareness of invasive plants will aid in slowing the spread.

Please visit our website at [www.inhs.uiuc.edu/research/CAPS/](http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/research/CAPS/) or email [invasives@inhs.uiuc.edu](mailto:invasives@inhs.uiuc.edu) for more information on invasives.