

ABSTRACT

In South Windsor not many people know or care about invasive plants. While driving by one will see an invasive plant in every other yard. After coming to this realization I started to see need for action against them. The reason that these plants are of much concern is because of their potential to harm our ecosystems, and the fact that they have already destroyed or changed entire ecosystems.

After this moment of revelation, I became attached to the idea of taking action against invasive plants and I wanted to educate my community on Invasive Plants. After some brainstorming and planning, we setup an outline for a workshop presenting the ideas of invasive plants and their removal, and we also created an informational brochure to pass around. The plan was to use these two methods (the workshop and brochures) to help educate the community about these plants.

After the workshop many of the participants seemed enthusiastic about trying to control the invasive plants and instead of me being one person against the many invasives, by educating my community I had released an army against them.

WHAT ARE INVASIVE PLANTS

Non-native, invasive plants have increasingly flooded into Connecticut. These plants are “alien” to the native ecosystem and aggressively grow, which allows the plants to out-compete and displace native species. (Fig. 1). The aggressive growing behavior of the invasive plants causes a drop in the biodiversity within the ecosystem by changing soil/water chemistry and reducing the resources available to native species. All of these are environmental costs, but there are also economical costs. The plants can affect agricultural businesses, damage private property, and bring down the value of your home.



Fig 1. A collage of common invasive plants found in Connecticut. From left to right, burning bush of (*Euonymus Alatus*), mile a minute (*Polygonum perfoliatum*), oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*), Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), and privet (*Ligustrum*)

Our Goal

The goal of this project was to educate the South Windsor community about these harmful plants, urge them to take action to protect native species, and prevent other problems associated with invasive plants. This project consisted of two components: 1) educational workshops on invasive plants in New England and 2) brochures summarizing material presented at the

THE WORKSHOPS

Planning

- Set up three dates
- Prepared a presentation
- Distribute fliers at SW Farmer's Market and local stores to promote workshop

Implementation

The first workshop took place on the 30th of November 2014 at the South Windsor High School media center and Nevers Park and the second was the following Wednesday. The workshop included:

- A presentation detailing: 1) what invasive plants are, 2) how they affect our environment, and 3) how to control them and different removal practices (Fig. 2);
- A presentation on the different kinds of invasive plants found in New England;
- Laminated samples of various invasive plants so that the participants could touch them up close;
- A walk through Nevers Park trails so that attendees could become familiar with some invasive plants that they may find around their neighborhood (Fig. 2);
- An informational packet similar to the brochure to take home.

I partnered with the South Windsor Food Alliance to organize the third workshop, which will be held on April 23rd 2015 at the community center. The workshop will proceed in much the same manner as the other, except the participants will partake in removal of invasive species.



Fig 2. (Right) The presentation portion of the invasive plant workshop at South Windsor High School. Participants were local community members from a diversity of backgrounds. (Left) The hands-on portion of the workshop in Nevers Park. Workshop participants learned how to identify invasive plants in the local park. The author is showing an invasive plant, oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)

THE BROCHURE

I used a Word template to create a trifold brochure entitled “Controlling Invasive Plants.” The brochure included sections of the following:

- Defining invasive plants
- Environmental costs of invasive plants
- Economical costs of invasive plants
- How invasive plants may affect you personally
- What can be done to address issues caused by invasive plants
- Methods of removal

The brochures were distributed through the help of Boys/girls scouts and local businesses

An example of the brochure is shown below:



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

“In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.” ~ Baba Dioum

Knowing is the first step before doing. If the people in my community do not know what invasive plants are and what they do to our environment, then how can we hope to address the many issues these invasive plants are causing? Our community center has burning bush (*Euonymus Alatus*) all around it (purposely planted!) and it's doors are guarded by two common reeds (*Phragmites australis*), both of which are invasive! If people in my community do not know about invasive plants, then how can we hope to prevent purposeful plantings? I believe that educating the community about these plants in a variety of ways is the answer. In the first workshop, nine out of the 12 participants to fill out a survey said that they had been motivated to take action. These individuals said they would first start with removing invasives from their own yards as well as by educating their friends and neighbors. The more people know about invasive plants, their affects, and how to control them the more likely they are to take action against these harmful plants, and that is why I plan to continue to educate my community and also plan to take some more active steps, I am hoping that next year or this I may be able to arrange a volunteer group to do some removal work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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