

Question: What are some of the most dangerous invasive plants in our area?

Answer: The first thing to discuss is the bigger question of what is an invasive plant. According to the Alabama Invasive Plant Council (AIPC) an invasive plant species is one that displays rapid growth and spread, establishes over large areas, and persists. Invasiveness is characterized by robust vegetative growth, high reproductive rate, and longevity. Even some native plants can become invasive under the right conditions.

There are literally thousands of species of invasive plants in the United States and we have more than our share in Alabama. As is so often the case we have brought most of the problems on ourselves. Many were brought for erosion control, livestock grazing, wildlife habitat improvement, and as ornamentals for our landscapes.

A question many people ask is why does a perfectly well behaved plant (in its native habitat) go berserk in their new home? Although, the reasons can be varied and quite complex in general the new plant lacks the natural controls present in the plants native habitat. Sometimes we use this to our advantage by finding the native pest of a plant and introducing it to our area. This has been done with a non-native musk thistle that has become a serious problem in pastureland and roadsides. A small weevil was found on the thistle in its native land and was subsequently imported and introduced on the musk thistle in our area with good results. Of course anytime a biological control is introduced we are always concerned that the control will become a pest itself. Because of this fear these organisms are tested as thoroughly as practical to make sure this doesn't happen.

To get back to your original question I have listed the ten worst plants identified by the AIPC: They are in no particular order; kudzu (you knew this one was there), cogongrass, tropical soda apple, tallowtree (popcorn tree), Chinese privet (I hate it), Japanese climbing fern, invasive roses, hydrilla, Eurasian water milfoil, and alligator weed. The last three are all aquatic plants that threaten our lakes and streams in Alabama.

As mentioned above I hate Chinese privet. I have large patches of it on my property and I have tried multiple methods of control. The first method I tried was to fence the area and let the goats eat it. The goats ate every last green sprig on every plant so I had to move them to another area so they would not starve and within a few weeks the privet was growing in this new area that was previously un-invaded. I am through with this natural control measure. My newest assault is to repeatedly cut the plant down and treat the fresh wound with herbicide. This is going to take a long time but at least I don't have to keep catching the goats which also liked my neighbor's shrubbery equally as well as the privet.

You can get more information on all of these plants go to the AIPC website at [www.se-eppc.org/alabama/](http://www.se-eppc.org/alabama/) or visit the Auburn University School of Forestry website at [www.aces.edu/forestry/invasive/](http://www.aces.edu/forestry/invasive/). Also, we are still pre-registering folks for our, "Sustainable Landscaping – Southern Style Conference" to be held September 25<sup>th</sup> at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Harvey Cotton, the director of the Huntsville Botanical Gardens will be one of our featured speakers and he will be discussing the invasive plant

issue. You can get information about this and other conferences we have planned by visiting the following website: [www.aces.edu/~gloveta/upcomingmeetings.php](http://www.aces.edu/~gloveta/upcomingmeetings.php)