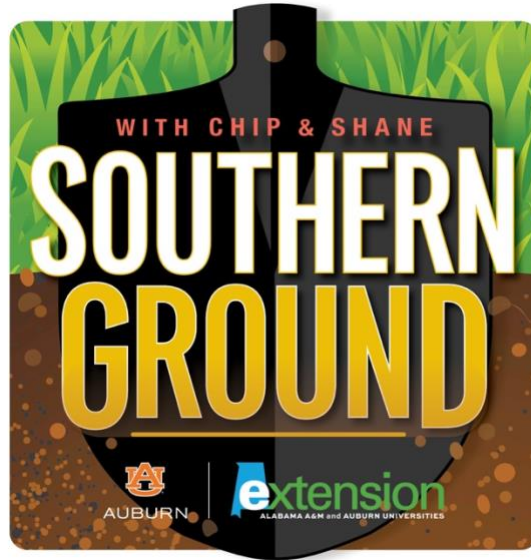




Season 1 Episode 18—Eradicating Invasive Plants

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Announcer

Welcome to the *Southern Ground* podcast provided by Alabama Extension through Auburn University. Extension educators Shane Harris and Dr. Chip East discuss seasonal lawn and garden topics, address common questions, and provide the practical solutions you want to know. Let's dig in to our southern ground.

Shane Harris

Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of *Southern Ground*. I'm Shane Harris and joining me is doctor Chip East sitting across from me for another episode here for *Southern Ground*.

Chip East

Hey, Shane, thank you today. Glad you're joining us for another episode of *Southern Ground*. Shane and I've been extension agents for a long time and enjoy talking to people about all things horticulture related.

Shane Harris

Glad to see you, Chip, this morning. We've got a special guest with us again today. We're going to talk about invasive plants. As we transition from the summer into the fall, invasive plants is definitely something that people may have a problem with and talk a little bit about how you can control those around your home, farm, or actually on the land that you may own. So, we want to welcome Jacob Hodnett, who's with us this morning.

Jacob Hodnett

Hey, thank you. Glad to be here.

Shane Harris

Jacob, you were past president with the Alabama Invasive Plant Council. So, I wanted to turn this question back for our listeners. What is an invasive plant? And tell us a little bit about the council here in Alabama.

Jacob Hodnett

Hey, sure will, I appreciate that. So, we are a group, small, but we try to meet once a year. The Alabama Invasive Plant Council. So, our mission, our goal is to educate. Get out there, more or less, and keep track and see what's happening across the landscape of Alabama as far as invasive plants. So, to answer your question of what is an invasive plant, we do have kind of a checklist that we go off of, that it meets these certain criteria. So, one, we traditionally look at the non-natives that get brought in whether it's from forage, erosion,

slips in, or ornamental, whatever the case. But these plants come into our natural landscape here in Alabama and start taking over. So, they are high producing, whether it is seeds, propagules, they start spreading, they start monopolizing, taking over our native landscape. And a lot more than that, but that's just the snippet of the top.

Chip East

Just because it's non-native, doesn't mean it doesn't grow well here.

Jacob Hodnett

Correct. So that would be ideal if it did.

Chip East

To be on this non-native list that's invasive, there's a lot of non-natives that will grow, but something that's invasive. There's a top ten list I've seen and things like that. So, I know there's more than ten. But is the one that's number one the worst in the state, and the number two is the second worst in the state? Or is it just some of the hardest to control? Or does whether it's number one or number ten, does it even matter?

Jacob Hodnett

So good question there, and I would answer that question, my number one may not be your number one. If you're dealing with one and not another, I think that kind of bumps it up the list. That's just our take as far as I think we look at it across the state as a whole. So, if it's happening in all quadrants of the state, that bumps it up the list. So that's why we would rank one, one instead of number ten per se.

Shane Harris

And as we describe an invasive plant you said it has a negative impact on the environment. And so, let's just throw a few examples, and we'll talk about that for the next few minutes. Classic is kudzu. Everybody in the South, deep south, is familiar with kudzu. It was brought in, introduced, and spread. And it's now everywhere. It

definitely has its pros. Probably has more negatives, but that would describe a classic example of an invasive plant that had just taken over. And it's continued to be here and it's very difficult to control and eradicate.

Jacob Hodnett

That is correct. So, as you see with kudzu, as you drive down the road, it'll overtop trees. It chokes things out. It becomes a monopoly, I guess would be the word to use.

Shane Harris

Monoculture.

Jacob Hodnett

Monoculture. There you go. But yeah, it does take over. And therefore, nothing underneath or around it survives.

Shane Harris

It is amazing, Chip, that some of these, we call them exotic, things that are brought in from other countries, and that's the difference between a native and something from another country would be described as exotic. But even invasive, that's definitely a negative term because you think of something invading a property. You've got ants in the house, they are invading the house, seems to spread, and becomes difficult to control. And I think the control part is going to be on most people's minds. I've got this, and it's just hard to get rid of.

Jacob Hodnett

Correct. And I would add right here real quick, when you brought up the kudzu, one that a lot of people don't see is the wisteria. It's very similar to kudzu, but it does not have the overtopping effect. And just like you said, you see it in a lot of people's yards as an ornamental. It has a beautiful bloom on it. But if they're keeping it mowed or they're keeping it trimmed, it's not going nowhere. But as soon as they walk away from it, as grandma passes away and the yard goes to pot, you come back in 2 or 3 years, and the whole house is covered. The whole yard is covered. So, you have to watch those that will be a little sneaky on you.

Chip East

There was an old home place on our farm. This is before we owned it. And there was some wisteria there. Well, when I was little, the house is gone, and it is just the wisteria left, you see. There's a concrete slab that was the back porch, but it was wisteria. We called it the jungle, and we climbed and played on it. And it's not there now, we've gotten rid of it. But yes. Now, I'm not saying it wasn't pretty, but yeah, growing up the top of trees, and then whatever tree it's in, you're just shading out the leaves of whatever tree it's in. So, if you care about the tree it's growing in, I don't like it, but it's a pretty plant. I hate to throw other plant, but ivy is another.

Jacob Hodnett

I was thinking the same thing.

Shane Harris

Bamboo.

Chip East

Oh.

Shane Harris

We've got a whole list here. We've got publications on our website. The Alabama Invasive Plant Council has their list. There's other publications from other universities that are out there. You know, these non-native invasive plants they harm the environment by crowding out native plants. They reduce regeneration of forests. We've all been hunting and walking through the woods and seeing plant after plant there that doesn't belong in the natural habitat. A few of those that come to mind here in Alabama is Chinese privet, thorny olive, mimosa, heavenly bamboo, or a type of nandina. We are now seeing Bradford pear. In the yard is Japanese honeysuckle. Ivy. I mean, you start looking at this list, these are a lot of plants that we've, I wouldn't say adopted, but they've sort of been here a long time that we sort of accept that they're here in the United States.

Jacob Hodnett

That's correct.

Chip East

Jacob, I've been part of the nursery industry a long time. It's something that we think, well, it's pretty, kind of like the wisteria. All right. I used to be a landscaper, and this client had someone design this landscape, and it had bamboo in it. And I know a lot of people who just love bamboo, so I gotta watch what I say. I don't want to insult anybody. But there was bamboo in this plan, and that's my job is to plant it. And I go talk to the client. And I said, please, is there anything else we can plant besides this? They were adamant about it. No, this designer spec'ed it there. And that's what you're going to plant. Well, we did. Well, we also had to do the maintenance on that every year for a while until they sold that property. And the people who got it now, and it's a jungle. It is a jungle. I could have stopped that. I tried to stop it, but if we just wouldn't plant it. It can be pretty. I'm not saying it can't. It can have uses. I know nurseries that buy thousands of dollars worth of bamboo to stake their trees with at tree nurseries and everything. So, it has uses, but it can just take over. And that's what happens. And it's very difficult to manage.

Shane Harris

Jacob, would you say a lot of these that are on the list were introduced from an ornamental standpoint? We know that the history of kudzu was brought in for erosion control. I would assume the Chinese and Japanese wisteria was brought in for being ornamental. The mimosa, or silk tree, was for having very pretty flowers that bloom in the summertime. Even the Japanese honeysuckle that we see in landscapes and in the forest. Was most of these introduced for, I guess, positive results?

Jacob Hodnett

I would think all of them, they had good intentions. They were brought here for some reason, or to test to see if they had a fit. The downfall with that, though, is when you take it out of their natural habitat where it had the enemies or it had competition that would keep it in check. You bring it over here into our environment. It has no, check. So then, therefore, when it gets a root hold, it runs rampant.

Shane Harris

And that's where landowners, homeowners somewhat fighting a losing battle unless they're educated or they're dedicated as y'all talked about, to really either not plant it, or when it becomes a problem, tackle it. I've got a mimosa tree that has popped up in my backyard. I've cut it back once and now it has grown again. I'm going to have to cut it back again. A lot of these things, you just have to constantly stay after. And we joke with the kudzu creeping into the backyard, you got to beat it back with a stick, you know. And here it comes again. It's amazing at these invasive exotic plants we've talked about with the weed control, boy they have a life span. Boy they take off and thrive in our environment and sometimes much better than our native plants.

Jacob Hodnett

Very true. And so, the key there, you just said consistency. With these invasives, it's not something you have a silver bullet for and you can go out there and voila, overnight they're gone. You're going to have to stay after it. The other downfall that you have with invasives is, they don't know property lines. So, if you don't have a good relationship with your neighbor, and it's across the fence, you're going to be continuously, it's a maintenance thing then. As you say with the kudzu that you're just going to keep knocking it back. And if you can do a working relationship and come together as a group and wrap your arms around the whole infestation, and then understand also too, we've not talked about how those invasives spread. So then, therefore, if you're understanding how did it get here. Did I plant it? Did I bring it in on equipment? Did it blow in? Did a bird drop it? How did it get here? Because traditionally we see, one we had mentioned is Cogan grass, it gets there somehow. Something had to develop or bring that, either that rhizome or that seed, to that spot to get it established. So, understanding all those aspects plays big in it, too.

Shane Harris

Chinese privet. The joke is it's always on the fence line. The seeds were dropped from a bird, and every piece of barbed wire fence post has a privet all down the road. So, we see that. That's what I want to lean toward is how they get established. So, understanding that also then leads to control.

Chip East

So, how's the best way to manage? And how we would manage kudzu may be different than another plant, but let's just take 1 or 2 of them and talk about some management strategies for, you want to just talk kudzu? We mentioned that earlier?

Shane Harris

I think it's number one on the list because it's been around almost a hundred years. Unfortunately, I've got photographs in Tallapoosa County where it was established and brought in. Jacob, you may not want to know

this, but Tallapoosa was known for growing and propagating and, even with 4-H projects, introducing kudzu across the southeast.

Jacob Hodnett

Whoops

Shane Harris

Whoops. It got away, didn't it?

Jacob Hodnett

Hindsight is always 20/20.

Shane Harris

Well, at the time, being used for erosion control, there were no trees. There was mostly cotton fields and pastures. They even saw it as a good forage for livestock. But what happened? We started putting trees back. We started putting power lines up. We started building houses. If kudzu is in the right place, it's a fantastic plant. We just don't want it eating our house.

Jacob Hodnett

That's correct. And it will overnight almost.

Chip East

It don't stop, like you say, when it gets to the property line.

Jacob Hodnett

It steadily grows.

Chip East

So, what are some management practices for kudzu. So, can we bulldoze it up? Can we plow it up? Do we spray it?

Jacob Hodnett

So, just like other invasives, kudzu has a massive reserve root system. So, it's one of those that you can spray, you can mow, you can take care of it, but it's just coming right back at you. The key with kudzu, depending on your setting, like a home lawn, is going to be consistency. You are going to have to keep it out of the trees first, because it's trying to get up, to get photosynthesis, to get those leaves out there, to produce back into those root reserves. So, if you can go through and keep it out of the treetops, shade is your friend. You keep it down underneath the understory, it's not going to do as well. So that's one thing I see a lot of times is just going through there and more or less pruning, cutting those runners, going up or going out. And then if you can backtrack it to

its main root source, because it's going to peg as it goes, but there where it first started and go from there. You can either keep spraying it till you deplete its energy source, or... To give you an example. Now I am pro herbicides. I think they work. But also at the house we've got a pasture with it and I've got goats. They're working wonders. Every time that leaf puts out, they eat it. And so eventually over time, I'll run it out with them just keeping it grazed down.

Shane Harris

So, let's define this word you'll see in our publications in recommendations is suppression. So along with control and management is suppression. Suppression with the herbicide and controlling these invasive plants, you may not get rid of it, day one. Its multiple applications of herbicide, its suppression, mowing, letting the goats feed on it, beating it back with a stick. Like you said earlier, consistently, but you got to understand that you have to have a management plan and suppression is a good thing.

Jacob Hodnett

That is correct. And you have to be consistent and understand it's not for the short term. You're in it for the long haul if you want to really eradicate it.

Chip East

Managing the kudzu by hand, it is super hard to be consistent. That goat is working for you all the time. So, I like that. That's good. Cattle will. They love it and all that. But if you don't have a fence around it or something like that, you could stake a goat, I guess out there on it. I like the herbicide idea. I've got some I've been spraying for a while. When it's up in trees, I can't spray that. So, I have to cut the vine, spray the vine, cut the vine, spray the vine, cut the vine, spray. I mean, it's just everywhere. Well, I didn't see that behind this tree. So, I go back in there a week later, and I thought, well there's some green up there. So, where's the vine? You have to hunt. When you first start, I mean, it's easy to see a bunch of vines. But you have to hunt, and oh, there's that vine. I didn't see it. It was behind that tree. And I get it, and I get it, and I get it. Over time, I've gotten it out of the trees. Well, I can manage it on the ground because I can spray that easier. But as Shane said, it keeps coming back. But there's certain herbicides that are better than others.

Shane Harris

What would you suggest here for kudzu? And we do have a publication on kudzu control based on residential areas or on property or in pastures.

Chip East

We've got two on kudzu management. One is the homeowner version, I call it. And it talks about products like roundup and remedy. So, the glyphosate or triclopyr are two of the active ingredients, and homeowners can buy those that we use. The kudzu on right of ways and forest situations. There's a lot of other herbicides we use there, and I can name several. One of them that I really like is escort.

Jacob Hodnett

I was going to say metsulfuron.

Chip East

Metsulfuron. Yeah.

Shane Harris

That's why we got Jacob here, to pronounce these hard words.

Chip East

Really, it's one of the cheapest herbicides you can buy. If you're thinking per acre. When you buy a pound of it, you'll think it's expensive. But when you're talking about just a few ounces, it'll tell you on the bottle. I know how much because I spray it, but per acre it's very little. And a bottle goes a long way. I will tell you that herbicide works slow. You'll put it out, and a week later you'll think, well I didn't spray this. But no, it does. I would almost say it's nearly three weeks before you start seeing results. It might be two. But in three weeks you'll start seeing some results. But I get better results from that. Again, it's cheaper. It's a turf herbicide, actually. That same thing is used in turf a lot. But anyway, that's a good one. There's other good ones. Some of them we don't need to use around water. But all these are listed in our publication. But it comes back. I mean...

Jacob Hodnett

It's not one shot.

Chip East

It's not one shot. Well, I can mention another herbicide, but I know I've sprayed it. It's gone. But another year goes by, I start seeing it again, and I've hit it again and let it cover the ground again and spray. And I'll get it that second time. And then, I'll say 10 years goes by, and there's one popped up. Now, I don't know if that came back from seed. I mean, that could have been....because it was years before I saw it again in that spot. But it's with any weed. A weed is just a plant that's out of place. It's anything we're wanting to manage. We're still coming back all the time. Your home lawn. We don't go mow grass once every year or two. It's consistent.

Jacob Hodnett

That's right. So, one thing I would add on that, not just specific kudzu, but just any plant. A lot of times it can be overwhelming. You got that big stand-up privet hedge. You've got the kudzu. You've got whatever. It can be intimidating. You can just throw your hands up and go ain't nothing I'm going to do make a difference. But, if you think of it from that aspect, you're correct. But if you look at it, everything I do, whatever, how small it may be, I'm limiting that plant from getting that much further. That one plant is not going to produce them seeds next year. So, you are gaining ground even if you don't seem like are. So be consistent. It's going to take time, but every step matters.

Shane Harris

The next question people are going to turn around and ask is when in the time of the year? When is the best time to control and spray or attack the kudzu? When's the best time to spray control Chinese privet, thorny olive, Japanese honeysuckle? The list goes on and on and on. Hopefully some of the literature that's out there can break that down. But just from your general perspective, and we've talked over the years, seems like fall. Late summer and fall tends to be a good open window to at least attempt to control and manage these invasive plants.

Jacob Hodnett

So yes, I will go back over my years of experience and education that I've had. That's tradition. I have changed up a little bit, and I tell people, I said treat when you have time. Because a lot of times if you wait till the fall, something comes up, you get sick, your equipment goes down. Whatever the case might be, if you've got time to spray, spray. Traditionally in the fall, though, what we look at is, why that is pushed to that, is that's when that plant is pulling in reserves for the next year. It's pulling down into the root system. So, therefore, if you're utilizing a herbicide, it's going to be pulled into the root zone, therefore, do a better job of controlling. The other thing, with the fall of the year, it's cooling off. I don't like snakes. I don't like yellow jackets. Fall of the year. The winter months is my ideal time when I like to treat just because it's a little cooler weather, and I ain't got to worry about all those other things that can get me.

Chip East

I agree. I've heard that a lot too. And we do that. That's good information. But I like what you said earlier, because if it's in the spring, and I see that, if we're talking kudzu or whatever, the weed is greening up, I'm not waiting for fall to spray. I say spray during the spring, summer, whenever. But in the late summer or early fall, I make it a point to go around and say, where have I missed? Where do I have any? And I make it a point to go around and make for sure I spray it that time of year. But no, that's not the only time I spray.

Jacob Hodnett

And that's what you usually see if you're really after something to eradicate it. And that would be the ideal. When it greens up in that spring, early summer, you spray it, and then you follow back up in the fall. See where you've missed. You're actually hitting it twice that year. So then therefore you're giving it kind of the double punch. It's an ideal approach because your key with any plant a lot of times is you're wanting to keep the seed bank in check to where it's not reproducing those seeds that year. So, you're gaining ground on the seed bank or propagules or whatever the case. You're slowing it down.

Shane Harris

So, as we talk about control methods and time, we can spray. We can do a stump treatment. We can do something called hack and squirt. So, let's talk about the methods. Because everybody thinks you can spray. We talked about mowing. We talked about getting a goat. You're not probably going to be able to pull them up by the root. Talk about the different advantages and strategies of this needs to be sprayed and this needs to be a stump treatment.

Jacob Hodnett

I'm going to use an example. So, at the house what I battle on our farm is trifoliate orange. If you've never had the experience, please come, I'll show you. I'll even share it with you. It's a pain. A thorn in my side. Pun intended. A lot of times, if it's in the pasture, if it's out, where I can mow it, I'm going to mow it. I'm going to keep it down and suppressed that way. But in the woods, when I dive into it, I've utilized three different methods. If it's small, it has a very shallow root system. I can reach down, and I can just pull it up by hand. Or I've got one of the little weed wrenches, they call it, and I've accomplished a lot like that. As far as the bigger stuff, as it gets up in size, you know, a foliar application works, but it has a very small leaves, not a lot of surface area to catch a foliar spray. So, I've utilized a basal treatment. So, again, like you would use instead of a water-based herbicide, we're going to talk about an oil-based herbicide. And there are some ready-to-use products that come ready to spray. Or you can buy it, you can blend it yourself. But it's just more or less treating the base of that tree. And I like that approach for two: one, it works. But two, I can kind of spray in there and not have to beat my way into... Where with a hack and squirt, you've got to get right there on the base of that tree and hack into the base of it.

Chip East

The trifoliate orange has a very waxy leaf which makes the foliar spraying tough. But when things are taller than you can spray, we can't reach all the leaves. Sometimes we can get a good kill if you could spray the plant. But if you can't get to the leaves of a plant, we can't spray. So that basal treatment is a good idea. We've got a good publication on that as well. Another method, Jacob, tell us about, like I mentioned earlier, how did the kudzu, that vine was growing up the tree, so I couldn't spray the vine up there where the green was. I had to cut the vine, and then I sprayed the vine. Or sometimes we can cut, if we were talking about the trifoliate orange, we could cut the plant and spray the stump. A stump treatment.

Jacob Hodnett

That's correct. So, the key on that with any species, with the kudzu, with a trifoliate orange, name any of them. Timing is critical. Now there's several products you could use. A lot of them have it on the label for a cut-stump treatment, and it's traditionally a 50/50 mixture or it's a ready to use, but yet you're treating that cut surface. So, the quicker you treat it, the more product is going to get pulled in. Because think of it just like a wound on our self. It starts healing the moment it's cut. So that stump starts healing over. So, the quicker you can get it sprayed, the better.

Shane Harris

And that means going back and within a few minutes making contact with that cambium layer on that stump. For example, the mimosa tree that I need to attack, I'm going to cut it down and put 41% glyphosate on there. You can also use 2,4-D from a homeowner standpoint. But there are other forest herbicides that you also can use. But as soon as you make that fresh cut, go ahead and put a little bit that 100% concentrate of that herbicide directly on the stump, and it should absorb it and hopefully kill that root system, therefore killing the plant. It's eliminated.

Jacob Hodnett

One quick thing I want to add, Chip, you were talking about the kudzu. I want to mention this. There is a product called clopyralid that is specific to legumes. So, like if you're trying to treat kudzu, and it's overtopping some of your ornamental bushes or something you want to save, as long as those species are not legumes, it's safe to use over tops of different things. So, just a safer product as far as offsite damage or collateral damage on spraying kudzu.

Chip East

I like that. That's good. And again, some things are labeled to you that we cannot use around water. So read the label. We've never done a podcast....we have a lot of meetings on pesticide safety and calibration and that sort of thing. We've never done a podcast on that Shane, but we need to add that to the list some time to talk about that very thing.

Shane Harris

Invasive plants are definitely a problem with people all over the southeast in the United States. I'm sure even worldwide. We hope you've gained some information by listening to this episode of *Southern Ground*. Jacob, we appreciate you being here, providing at least a sample, an introduction of invasive plants, and talk about a few problems. That list is definitely long. Be sure to check out our publications, more on invasive plants. And then some of the control methods. And then stay tuned with us. And there's also workshops. There's programs. There's videos. Even the Alabama Invasive Plant Council has an annual conference where we talk about control methods on a lot of these plants that we discussed today.

Jacob Hodnett

That is correct. And we'd love to have you. You can check us out. We do have a website. So, if you Google the Alabama Invasive Plant Council, it'll pull up our website. Some good information on plant lists. You can see who our board members are. They're all across the state, a wealth of knowledge, and are eager to help and advise in any way we can.

Shane Harris

And I've attended a couple of those over the years, and they've been well worth it. A lot of good information, especially some of the tours doing identification as well as some learning of the control method techniques. If you own a piece of property, you're going to have some type of invasive plant or a plant problem at some point.

Chip East

Thank you for joining us today. Thank you for listening to another episode of *Southern Ground*. If you have any questions about invasive plants, I'm sure you can call somebody or contact somebody with the Invasive Plant Council, or you can give us a call at your local extension office. We can be found online at www.aces.edu.

Shane Harris

Thank you for listening to another episode of *Southern Ground*.

Announcer

Southern Ground has been a production of Alabama Extension at Auburn University.