

Battling Invasives

By Gloria Hildebrandt

Last June we had our local conservation authority send a staff member to evaluate the property for invasive plant species. We have been working on eliminating Garlic Mustard, *Vinca Minor* or Periwinkle, Buckthorn and *Multiflora* Rose, but the staff member walked the property with us and showed us some invasive species we weren't aware of.

We didn't know about Wild Chervil, Reed Canary Grass, Honeysuckle and non-native Bellflower, although we had noticed that they were growing in scattered abundance about the property.

The staff member sent us a proposed plan to manage the invasives, including her markings on a property map that Mike had created. It's easy to see where the problem areas are.

We have been focused on tackling Buckthorn, so I was surprised that the first recommendation was to work on Wild Chervil. I had thought Wild Chervil was a kind of early Queen Anne's Lace, and I had been letting it grow. Its white flowers are so pretty. But no, it has to go, and needs to be hand pulled out by the tap root or sprayed with a Roundup solution... for the next few years.

Why Invasives Succeed

One of the reasons that invasive species are so successful is that they are usually downright pretty or have other apparent benefits. Periwinkle has pretty blue flowers and is promoted as a good ground cover. Is it ever! I drive by Escarpment forests and see vast blankets of nothing but Periwinkle. They prevent everything else from growing and because of their

tough, waxy leaves and stems, don't seem to be set back by Roundup. They have to be hand weeded out. From three separate areas in our forest, we are now down to one patch that needs to be removed.

Multiflora roses bloom prolifically and smell heavenly but spread like mad, becoming huge stands.

Honeysuckle grow into big bushes that are covered with pretty little yellow flowers. But they too are thuggish spreaders. Even Buckthorn seems to have advantages, as they form an impenetrable barrier, keep their green leaves into the fall, and their female trees produce dark blue berries. Yet they will take out everything else from a forest.

We have a little Goutweed problem along the trail at the back of the property. But as anyone with Goutweed knows, there's no such thing as a small Goutweed problem. If you try to weed out Goutweed by hand, you'll be doing nothing else for a very long time. The next priority on the management plan is to spray that Goutweed with the Roundup solution.

Hand Weeding

Reed Canary Grass crept into our pond before we knew what it was. It grows so densely that it chokes out other plants and looks like it's difficult for fish and animals to get through. It



In front of the desirable yellow Marsh Marigolds growing in the swamp is the clump of Reed Canary Grass that we were able to pull out last year. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT

grows both on dry land and in water. You can't spray Roundup near water, so Canary Grass is best cut short to prevent the spread of seeds, or if possible, it can be pulled out. This grass is not considered invasive in our area, but I don't like it and want to get rid of it.

Mike and I spent part of a summer morning last year when the swamp happened to have dried out, pulling out a big clump of Reed Canary Grass. It came out relatively easily, which likely means that it will bounce back this year. We'll have to see.

With the water out of the swamp, we were also able to pull out some of the Yellow Irises, about two wheelbarrows' worth. But I know we didn't get them all. There are plenty more where they came from.

My father had introduced Yellow Irises to the swamp before he knew they would be a problem. The swamp had been full of native Blue Flag Irises and he thought a few Yellow Irises would look good among

them. Disastrously, they spread, took over and completely eliminated the gorgeous and delicate native Blue Flags. If we ever get the yellow thugs out of the swamp, I hope to be able to re-introduce the Blue Flags.

We have some Honeysuckles scattered through the forest, and I learned that cutting them down is not the solution as they merely sucker from the stumps. They need to be treated with Roundup. Non-native Bellflower has to be treated the same way.

All the invasives that we uproot, cut or dig out, go to the fire pit to dry out for burning. I've accepted that it's a multi-year or perhaps even constant issue to deal with them.

And who knows, we may even learn of new invasive plant species that are trying to take over our land.

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