

“Invasive Plants” by Sally Cureton

Invasive plants are a big problem in the Rockingham Springs Arboretum. Some of you may have the same plants in or near your yards. I can recall walking on one of the trails behind Hopkins Cabin about five years ago and spotting a big stand of **Japanese Stilt Grass**. Highly invasive, it came into this country about 40 years ago as packing material and has spread through the Eastern states as far north as Pennsylvania. It is shade-tolerant and forms a very dense growth in the forest under-story and in meadows. An annual, each plant will produce between 100 and 1000 seeds. It also spreads through rhizomes.

Unfortunately, there aren't any animals that eat **Japanese Stilt Grass**. It spreads easily and will eventually crowd out any native plants. Where it is very dense, there may be the loss of an entire generation of trees. It can be seen it on many of the hiking trails off Skyline Drive as well as in the mountains of North Carolina. It goes to seed in late August through early September. Each year volunteers spend several days in the Arboretum pulling this grass and each year there is less to pull.

Another invasive we have a lot of trouble with in the Arboretum is **Japanese Honeysuckle**. It has been planted widely in this country as an ornamental, for wildlife food and habitat, and to control soil erosion. Despite its virtues, it also displaces native plants along the forest edge and in open areas. This is a difficult plant to get rid of because of its extensive root system and its tendency to strangle other plants. A third invasive that we have been pulling a lot of lately in the Arboretum is **Garlic Mustard**. It grows about two feet tall with lovely little white flowers, but it can take over large areas very quickly. Fortunately, it comes up easily.

Some of the other plants that live in this area that are considered invasive include, burning bush, autumn olive, Bradford pear, English ivy, tree of heaven and mimosa, or silk tree. With **Burning Bush**, birds eat the fruit and spread the plant into the forest. One way to control this is to prune off all flowers so that the fruit cannot form. **Autumn Olive** should just be entirely removed. Pruning only worsens the problem by making it grow more vigorously. **Bradford Pear** sends out puffy white clouds of flowers in the spring that drift into the forest and germinate displacing native vegetation.

English Ivy can kill the trees that it grows on. It also crowds out native wildflowers and ferns in the forest. If you like the look of it and most of us do, it is best to keep it under control by continuous clipping and not composting the cuttings. **Tree of Heaven** looks like a cross between sumac and something tropical. It is spreading rapidly through the country. It prevents native plants from growing by releasing chemicals into the soil. The **Mimosa** or **Silk Tree** has a tendency to produce suckers. It also spreads into natural areas, stealing

space from native trees and shrubs.