

Invasive Plants

Over the past 150 years, and accelerating in recent times, a variety of non-native plants, animals, insects, and other organisms have been introduced within Connecticut. While many of these plants coexist peacefully within our state's ecosystems, others cause harm to human health, soil, plants, animals, and water quality. These problematic non-native species, commonly referred to as "invasive," are characterized by rapid growth and the ability to outcompete native species.

Middletown is not immune to the effects of invasive species, with vines, insects, and fungal pests damaging trees; aquatic plants degrading water quality and recreational uses of rivers and lakes; shrubs and other plants reducing biodiversity and food for birds and insects; and more.

The following invasive plants are widely prevalent in Middletown and have already caused widespread damage:

- **Japanese barberry** creates dense thickets that harbor white-footed mice and increase the prevalence of deer ticks in that area.
- **Autumn olive**, an Asian import originally used for erosion control, tends to encroach on the edges of open fields where its ability to fix nitrogen allows it to outcompete native species.
- **Garlic mustard**, a flavoring herb from Europe, changes the soil chemistry so that other plants cannot grow nearby.
- **Japanese knotweed** forms dense stands with equally dense root systems that crowd out all other plants once it gets established.
- **Oriental bittersweet** grows rapidly, sprouting from a base that can attain up to 4 inches in diameter, and can topple a tree with its heavy woody tendrils.

If you discover you have invasive plants on your property, it is best to remove them as soon as possible to prevent a serious infestation and a challenging removal process.

The City of Middletown welcomes your help in removing invasive plants and planting native alternatives on your own property. Replacing invasive plants with native species provides food for many kinds of wildlife, including:

- Oak, butternut, and hickory trees provide food for wild turkeys, deer, squirrels, chipmunks, and raccoons.
- Bee balm, trumpet honeysuckle, and cardinal flowers attract hummingbirds and other pollinators.
- Sunflowers, thistles, and asters attract goldfinches.
- Planting extra parsley, carrot, and dill give food for several species of swallowtail butterflies.

The following are a list of invasive plant resources that cover identification, removal methods, and good choices for native alternatives to plant in their place.

- Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District Guide: *Invasive Plants in Your Backyard*: http://www.conservect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Invasives_guide_2016_web.pdf
- Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group Plant List: https://cipwg.uconn.edu/invasive_plant_list/
- UConn Plant Database: <http://www.hort.uconn.edu/plants/>
- Invasive Plants and Native Alternatives (shared with permission from Peter Picone, DEEP wildlife biologist): <https://drive.google.com/open?id=17vISbmqxSlog8nOBToxiTwTy1HhZdI2J>
- Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Invasive Species links and statutes: https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2702&q=323494&deepNav_GID=1641

For more information, contact the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District at 860-346-3282.