

Invasive Plants II

This week I am going to pick up right where I left off last week. I will be highlighting four more invasive plants, and touching on each one. So here we go.

Honeysuckle/*Lonicera* species

Invasive honeysuckles have really gained a foothold in many parts of the country. They thrive under neglect and spread rampantly. Honeysuckle is still widely planted today. The number of cultivars that have made their way to the market is astounding. Honeysuckles have nice spring flowers, and some can have pleasing fall color, which leads to them being highly praised. These plants can quickly take over native woodlands and choke out our native species. I have seen this plant time and time again wreck extreme havoc on our natural ecosystems. If you see this plant in a nursery, just keep on walking and find yourself a quality plant to liven up your landscape.

Amur Maple/*Acer ginnala*

You can find Amur Maple being sold in almost every nursery where it will grow throughout the US. It grows fast but does not get too tall. It is extremely adaptable and has great red fall color. It even flowers somewhat nice when you consider it is a maple. With traits like these, shouldn't we all run out and plant one in our yard? Not for a second. I have to admit, I was fooled by Amur Maple as well. When I learned of this tree in college, it seemed that it possessed great merit for our harsh urban landscapes. To be quite honest, I even had one planted in my yard. That was until I began working at the Morton Arboretum and was placed in charge of the Maple Collection. What I saw was astonishing.

Amur Maple was escaping into all of the surrounding woodlands and

grassy areas. It looked like our friend Johnny gave up on the apples and decided to go with Amur Maple instead. Lets just say that the tree in my yard did not last long after that, and for that matter, neither did too many at the Arboretum. This tree demonstrates how the nursery industry can mass propagate a plant before they really know what its negative potential is. New plants need to be evaluated over a lengthy period of time to evaluate all aspects. But money can be a big motivator, and whoever sells the plant first makes the most money.

Norway Maple/*Acer platanoides*

Norway Maple is a common tree in the nursery industry and has been planted for many years. This tree has become extremely invasive on the east coast and was beginning to show this tendency at the Arboretum. In addition to having invasive qualities, this tree does not tend to hold up to the test of time in the landscape. Norway Maple is very prone to girdling roots. Some of the roots begin to wrap around the base of the tree when it is younger. At this stage it does not cause severe problems, but when the tree begins to mature, symptoms arise. As the trunk grows larger, the circling roots begin to constrict the vessels that carry nutrients throughout the tree. Very simply, the tree chokes itself to death. Norway Maple has been extensively over planted across the US. There are many superior trees to Norway Maple, so choose one of those. You will be happy you did.

Autumn-olive & Russian-olive/*Elaeagnus umbellata* & *Elaeagnus angustifolia*

Here are two more species of plants that you can see escaping into the wild across the US. Autumn-olive grows as a shrub and Russian-olive

develops into a large tree, which usually tends to fall apart and die due to the numerous insects and diseases it is prone to. Autumn-olive can become a very big hassle with its aggressive nature. It was once used in restoration work in many areas, which has hastened its escape into the wild. It still baffles me why anyone would use a non native plant in a restoration project. The whole point is to restore an area as close to its native condition as possible. It is not the place to be using exotic plants. I think after all the mishaps; people are finally beginning to see the big picture.

That wraps it up for this week. Next week I will conclude this series of articles on invasive plants by highlighting four more plants to be on the lookout for.