

How to stop the spread of invasive plants

By Florrie Funk

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Many of Newton's residents are not aware of the crisis threatening biodiversity in our parks and their own back yards. Although there is no easy solution to the problem of invasive plants, here are some things that citizens can do to help:

- Learn to identify invasive plant species and remove them from your property.
- If your property abuts a park or wooded area, be sure that your non-native landscaping materials don't spread beyond your property line.
- Never dump yard waste into parks or conservation areas. Many common landscaping plants, especially ground covers such as English Ivy, Winter Creeper, Pachysandra and Vinca, reproduce vegetatively, so cuttings can root and spread aggressively. Walk along the boundaries of Newton's conservation lands to see what happens when homeowner are careless about this.
- Learn about native plants and use them in your landscaping. Your yard can be part of the solution to ecosystem fragmentation.
- Encourage city officials to develop a plan to remove invasive plants and to reintroduce native plants on city property. Learn from other communities how they trained personnel, organized volunteer efforts, and obtained funding.
- Be aware that cautious and strategic use of herbicides may sometimes be necessary. Many species resprout with renewed vigor even when they are cut down to ground level. Removal of root systems can be impractical and destructive to soil structure and other organisms, and soil disturbance usually increases germination of invasive plant seeds. There is a small risk of unwanted side effects in the use of herbicides, but the alternative may be a devastating and irreversible loss of species. Check the National Park Service's Fact Sheets (nps.gov/plants/alien) and The Nature Conservancy's "Weed Control Methods Handbook" (tncweeds.ucdavis.edu)

Florrie Funk, florriemfunk@aol.com assisted with the 2006 Newton comprehensive plant survey. This article is a follow up to her March 2007 article "The importance of removing invasive plants".