

invasive species

Invasive species are those that are introduced to new areas and that spread aggressively outside of their normal range, threatening the environment, the economy or society (including human health). They may prey upon native species, outcompete them for resources or spread disease. They can originate from other continents or other parts of North America, but not all non-native species are invasive in all situations.

Invasive species are the second-most significant threat to global biodiversity, after habitat loss. And that's one reason your participation in this cross-country BioBlitz is so valuable.

Together, we are spotting species and recording them, including invasive ones, which can help identify where work may be needed to remove these invasives.

Here are some common invasive plants that you may spot during the Big Backyard Bioblitz.



Canada thistle

Despite its name, this invasive thistle is not from Canada. It is believed to have come over from the eastern Mediterranean region. It was likely one of the first weeds that early settlers imported to North America. It is found in all provinces and the Yukon and Northwest Territories.



European buckthorn

European buckthorn is native to Eurasia. It was introduced to North America as an ornamental shrub for fencerows and wildlife habitat. This invasive species is found from Nova Scotia to Saskatchewan.



Dog-strangling vine

European swallow-wort, most commonly known as dog-strangling vine, is a member of the milkweed family. Despite its name, it doesn't pose any real threat to dogs. It is found in parts of Ontario and southern Quebec.



Garlic mustard

Brought to North America by early colonists, this invasive plant is now spreading across the continent at a rate of 6,400 square kilometres per year; an area 10 times the size of Toronto. Garlic mustard occurs in southern and eastern Ontario and parts of Quebec. Isolated populations have been found in British Columbia and the Maritime provinces.



Woodland angelica

Woodland angelica may have a flower very similar to Queen Anne's lace, but beware: it's actually a member of the celery family and a serious invader of wooded edges and moist open areas. It can be found in Quebec and the Maritime provinces.

Photos: Canada thistle by John Slowry; european buckthorn by turtlegirl1997; dog-strangling vine by MacMarzolini; arvine garlic mustard by Liv Monck-Whipp; woodland angelica by Shawna Wallace.



Purple loosestrife

Purple loosestrife is a wetland plant native to Europe and Asia that was brought to North America in the early 19th century. This highly invasive plant was likely introduced when its seeds were included in soil used as ballast in European sailing ships and discarded in North America. The plant is still used in flower gardens and occasionally sold in nurseries today. This plant has spread across Canada.



Scotch broom

Scotch broom is a perennial shrub originally from Europe. Introduced as an ornamental plant in the mid-19th century, it is now the emblematic poster child of invasive species in British Columbia. This plant also occurs in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.



Wild parsnip

Wild parsnip is a member of the carrot/parsley family. The plants grow wild along roadsides, abandoned fields, meadows, yards, railways and trails, and produce yellow flowers that appear similar in shape to Queen Anne's lace. The plant's sap contains chemicals that can cause severe burns to eyes and skin. Wild parsnip has been reported in all provinces and territories, except Nunavut.



Giant hogweed

Giant hogweed is an extremely invasive species that originated from Asia and eastern Europe. This perennial is a member of the carrot and parsley family. Giant hogweed can pose a serious health hazard for humans. If the plant's watery, clear sap comes into contact with human skin and is then exposed to sunlight, the UV radiation can cause severe burning and weeping blisters. This plant is found in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada.



Leafy spurge

Native to central and southern Europe, leafy spurge is believed to have been transported to North America in the early 19th century and then spread across western Canada.



Phragmites

Phragmites (common reed) is a large perennial grass that grows up to five metres tall. It is found in wetlands and roadside ditches, where it outcompetes native species. Phragmites is most commonly found in southern Ontario and Quebec.

Photos: purple loosestrife by Terence Gui; Scotch broom by deedee32; wild parsnip by Pierre André; giant hogweed by brynaturk; leafy spurge by Inemannca; phragmites by Andrew Sebastian.