

Invasive and Noxious Species

March 3-8 is National Invasive Species Awareness Week. Invasive species are those species that are not native to the ecosystem and those whose introduction can cause economic or ecosystem harm as well as human health problems. In the United States there are many invasive species, which can include such organisms as plants, insects, fungi, bacteria, virus, mite, or nematode. Some invasive plant species in Nebraska are Russian Olive, Crown Vetch and St. John's Wort. Invasive plants are allowed on properties as there are no regulations associated with invasive species. Invasive species should be monitored and planted in areas where they cannot spread easily.

All states also have a noxious weed list which includes invasive weeds. These weeds are those that must be controlled if they are found on your property in accordance with the law. Nebraska has 10 noxious weeds: Canada thistle, Musk thistle, Plumeless thistle, Phragmites, Saltcedar, Purple loosestrife, Leafy Spurge, Spotted knapweed, Diffuse knapweed, and Japanese knotweed. Plants are put onto the noxious weed list by the Nebraska Weed Control Association.

Canada, musk, and plumeless thistle are all biennial plants, meaning that they live for 2 years. Their first year of life is as a rosette, their second year of life they bolt and grow one tall stalk on which they produce flowers to become seed later in the year and then they die. Canada thistle has smaller, lighter pink flowers. Musk thistle and plumeless thistle are two very similar thistles. These both have a large deep purple to pink colored flower about the same size. Musk thistle has spines on each of the lobes of the leaves and it has a length of stalk that is spineless just below the flower head in contrast to plumeless thistle.

Phragmites, purple loosestrife, and Japanese knotweed can take over an area surrounding waterways and restrict the flow of rivers and streams in a very short period of time. Phragmites is a very tall grass with a panicle of seeds on the top. They are easy to identify by their yellow-green coloration contrasting with the blue-green color of many other tall, water grasses. Purple loosestrife is a shrub that has a beautiful purple flower spike and has heart shaped leaves. Japanese knotweed is the newest noxious weed to Nebraska. It has hollow stems, white fleece-like flowers, and red in the stems. Purple loosestrife and Japanese knotweed were originally landscape plants but they took off once they got around waterways.

Saltcedar is a small tree that did a lot of damage when Lake McConaughy receded. This tree is a light-green color with lavender, panicle-shaped flowers. It doesn't have leaves, it has scales similar to a juniper. This tree is controlled very easily by flooding.

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Leafy spurge is a small perennial that has small oblong leaves and has a milky sap when it is broken or cut. The flowers on leafy spurge are green, tiny and very non-descript. What people usually think of for the flowers for this plant are actually the bracts, which are yellow.

Spotted and Diffuse knapweed are usually lumped together as they are very similar plants. These are both biennial plants like the thistles. They have compound, daisy-like, flowers that are finely dissected and are usually white, pink or purple. They also have bracts beneath the flowers.

If you see any of these plants in your landscape or on your property you need to control them. If you are unsure about the identification of any plants, bring a sample into the extension office for correct identification. Most control can be accomplished by repeatedly mowing, grazing, or chemical treatments. The chemicals to use are most often either 2,4-D or Glyphosate products.

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