

## Even More Invasive Plant Q/As

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Here are more answers to the questions you've asked:

Q: I've got some hostas, Asian azalea hybrids, daffodils, tulips, crape myrtles, and a Leyland cypress hybrid. I know they are not native to Virginia, but they do not appear on any invasive plant lists either. Are they OK to have?

A: These species are considered "well-behaved exotic plants." From an IMA perspective and parkland health, well-behaved aliens remain on private property and stay out of forests, thus they are fine to grow. Ecologically, scientists equate varieties like Leyland cypresses and daffodils to "plastic plants" and "silk flowers" because exotics contribute little to the ecosystem, but they do 1) help with erosion control (as do tarp berms), 2) provide shelter and nesting sites, and 3) supply some added benefits, such as air purification. Deer, rabbits, and slugs might browse on a certain exotic species while hummingbirds and pollinating insects sip nectar from yet another. If you want to create a truly wildlife-friendly backyard, a native plant attracts more animal species than the typical foreign one. If you are wondering about the invasive status of your plants, explore these websites:

[http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural\\_heritage/invspdflist.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/invspdflist.shtml)  
[www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive\\_plants/weeds/index.shtm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/index.shtm)

Q: If birds eat berries from [English ivy](#), [Russian olive](#), [Japanese barberry](#), and other invasive plants, the plants are feeding wildlife, so that's good, right?

A: The invasive plants are doing more harm than good. From a native plant's perspective, the invasives bully their way into the environment, either through physical smothering (English ivy) or through altered soil chemistry (olives and barberry).

From an animal's vantage, invasive plants' leaves, roots, stems, seeds, and berries are unable to nourish as many critters as native plants. Other indigenous animals are host-specific to one or two plants, such as spicebush swallowtail caterpillars only eating spicebush and sassafras leaves. Once exotic, invasive plants overrun the environment, finding the proper, nutritious meal becomes challenging.

Putting this scenario into perspective, let's say that the only food available in all of Fairfax County (including Arlington, Alexandria, and the cities) is pepperoni pizza. Pizza is a nutritious food, with calcium in the cheese, protein in the meat and cheese, carbohydrates in crust, and loads of vitamins in tomato sauce. Sure, some kids might think it's a dream come true... for a little while. As we know, people have different dietary requirements, just like the wildlife counterparts. People who are vegetarians, allergic to wheat gluten, have dairy sensitivities, religious dietary restrictions, must eat low salt/fat diets, or simply do not like pizza are in trouble. Regular commuters outside of the county can easily bring home different foods and ingredients. Others with vehicles can make long food expeditions several times a week, but that gets tiresome fast. People without transportation, especially those in central Fairfax (KPW), are in dire misfortune. Many folks would find the food difficulties too great a problem and emigrate. This situation would cause an area to go from a diverse population to commuters who often eat pepperoni pizza.

Q: Why not let the invasive plants take over? Survival of the fittest, may the toughest plant win, right?

A: If invasive plants take over the woodlands, biodiversity is lost. One important aspect to maintaining healthy, native biodiversity is addressed in the above pizza example. Another impact of one plant species killing another is how well the new plant fills the niche of its predecessor. Say English ivy takes over a river embankment killing all native plants. Besides the lost food reserves, this vine fails to control erosion as well as the native alders, silky dogwoods, black willows, and other riparian plants do. Mile-a-minute, another invasive vine, is an annual; when it dies in the fall, it serves no wintertime erosion benefits after displacing better-suited native perennials.

Q: I'm ripping out invasive plants from my yard. Can I mulch them or bag them up for brush pick-up?

A: That answer depends both on the species and the season. General rule of thumb is if the invasive plant is seeding or fruiting, throw the whole plant into the regular trash to ensure removal of all seeds. In most other cases, the plant debris can probably be turned to mulch. The primary exception is English ivy,

which should be thrown into the garbage at any time of the year because the vines or even a single leaf can sprout roots and grow into a new plant, even in a compost pile. We certainly don't want lawn bags filled with English ivy getting chopped up and baby vines distributed through city mulch! If you have specific questions about the plant you are trying to eradicate, check this website:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/naspf/programs/forest-health-protection>, contact the FCPA through <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/publicworks/recycling-trash/yard-waste>, or ask me.

If you would like to join a workday or have other questions about IMA, please contact me at [greg@grsykes.com](mailto:greg@grsykes.com). [To be continued](#)....

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