Two Ways Invasive Plants Enter Parks

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During discussions about invasive plants, folks frequently ask how these weeds entered natural areas. Here are examples demonstrating how two noxious species got into the parks and how dumping yard debris harms the environment.

Next to the Glen Cove II townhouses, rose-of-Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*) branches with last autumn's seed pods were discarded on parkland alongside a storm drain outfall (Figure 1). Rose-of-Sharon is an invasive weed that spreads through seed distribution. Sure enough, its seedlings already sprouted near the pile. Since the bundles were tossed by a waterway, flowing water carries seeds deeper into the park. Adding to the problems, the bundles were tied with nylon twine. Even after the plant matter decomposes, the plastic loops remain and can entangle wildlife. The best way to be rid of these branches is to bag them with household trash. Keep those seeds out of recycled yard debris because they can survive that processing and spread elsewhere. To reduce spreading this plant, cut the branches immediately after blossoming finishes and before the fruits mature. Better yet, replace the bushes with a native alternative such as swamp rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*).

Figure 1. Bunches of rose-of-Sharon full of seed pods lie on parkland next to a storm drain outfall. Photo by Greg Sykes.

In the second example, the good news is that someone is getting rid of their invasive creeping liriope (*Liriope spicata*). The bad news is that they dumped the clumps beside Royal Lake Park's parking lot (Figure 2). Even worse is that this person returned a few weeks later and unloaded even more

Figure 2. Had these liriope clumps remained by the Royal Lake Park parking lot where they were dumped, they would have survived and invaded healthy native forests. Photo by Lynn Cline.

liriope! In addition to dumping being illegal, this activity illustrates another way invasive species enter natural areas. These clumps can easily survive, grow, and spread into the parks. Over the years, Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteers found similar patches multiplying out of piles discarded on parkland. When removing liriope and other bulbous weeds from the yard, the best actions are to shake or hose off as much soil as possible, then throw the roots into trash bags with other garbage destined for the incinerator or landfill. Like the seeds, invasive plant roots should never be recycled with yard debris because they could survive composting, particularly when the composting is incomplete or infrequently churned.

In both cases, IMA volunteers collected all this waste and sent it to the incinerator. Susan Jewell discusses more problems with illegally discarding yard debris in her 2009 article, "That That Pesky Yard Waste: It's Biodegradable, So Why Can't I Just Dump It in the Woods?", *The Fairfax Chronicle* 7(2):4. Everyone can pitch in and do their bit to help the environment by properly discarding yard debris. Doing so is victory for all.

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