

What's That Plant?

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This set is another incarnation of the Invasive Plant Q/As, but this time with some native species found around Royal Lake:

Q: What's that tall, bushy plant that grows around the water's edge? It looks like bamboo.

A: That plant is the black willow (*Salix nigra*). Frequently growing on shorelines, this native tree's root structure is ideally designed for erosion control. Black willows are short-lived. These trees do not have much commercial significance unless employed for direct erosion control, though American Indians used the branches in basketry. Black willow leaves are narrow and form dense clusters resembling bamboo; this plant is a fine substitute if you want the "look" of bamboo without the invasive hassles. However, the two plant groups are unrelated: willows are trees and bamboos belong to the grass family.



Figure 1. Black willow growing on a shoal looks like bamboo from a distance.



Figure 2. Greenbrier vines may be prickly but are welcomed by wildlife.

Q: What's that vine growing everywhere with the sharp thorns all over it? It feels like, is tough and even coils like barbed wire!

A: Another Virginia native, that plant is probably common greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*), but this area hosts other members of the genus *Smilax* which look fairly similar. Whereas the thorns are sharp enough to tear skin and rip clothing should one become tangled in the strong vines, many animals consume newly formed leaves. The dark, bluish-colored berries provide winter nutrition to over 40 bird species!

Q: What's that plant growing in Royal Lake near the shore line with the pretty yellow flowers?

A: That plant is floating primrose-willow (*Ludwigia peploides*). This particular species is native to the area, but the water primrose family rapidly spreads and many members, especially the South American species *L. hexapetala*, are considered invasive. The yellow flowers may be beautiful, but steer clear of introducing even the native varieties into your backyard water garden or it will soon choke with *Ludwigia*.

Do you have an eco-question? Send it to me and it might get published! Better yet, join us during a habitat restoration workday and ask your questions in person! Send an e-mail to me asking to be on the IMA volunteer list.



Figure 3. Floating primrose-willow blankets the shoreline.

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