

Invasive Species Profile: Rose-of-Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*)

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Native Range: throughout Asia; national flower of South Korea

U.S. Introduction: before 1600, as an ornamental shrub, some herbal applications

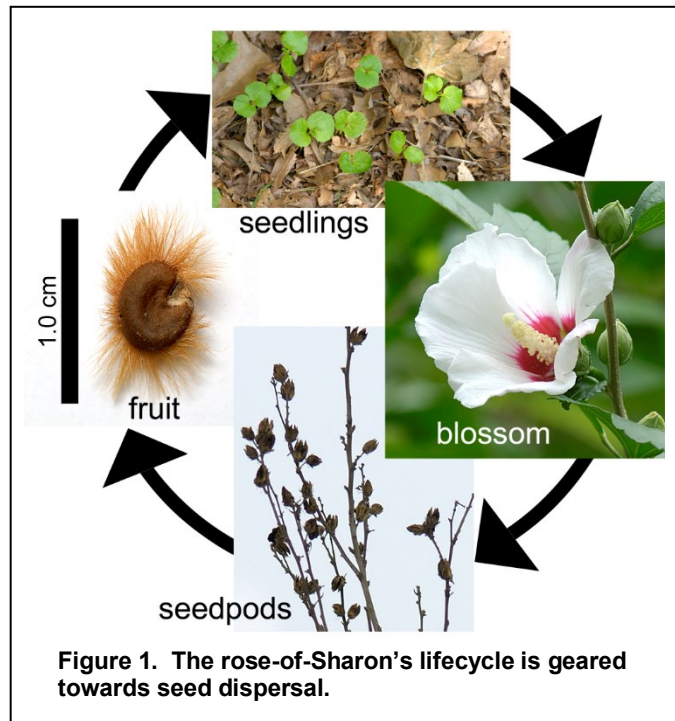
Life Cycle: woody perennial

Means of Spreading: seeds

Commercially Available: yes

Control Method: hand-pull seedlings; use a Weed Wrench on large saplings; chop down mature bushes. Herbicidal treatments usually not necessary. Bundle for curbside pick-up; bag branches with seed pods for landfill or incineration.

Good Alternative Species: similar floral color and shape are found in herbaceous swamp rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*), halberd-leaf rosemallow (*H. laevis*), scarlet rosemallow (*H. coccineus*), and seashore mallow (*Kosteletzkya virginica*); a large-flowered woody tree alternative is the sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)



Comments: Contractors and KPW residents commonly plant rose-of-Sharon, especially along fence lines. Three-inch-wide pink, white, or purple flowers and fast growth make the rose-of-Sharon marketable. However, these large blossoms lead to prolific seed production. The fruits have tiny hairs designed for wind dispersal, sending seeds over 50 feet from the parental plant! As a result, rose-of-Sharon escapes the confines of cultivation and roots in the forests.

The obvious barrage comes from rose-of-Sharon seeds blowing into parks from neighboring properties, and like any other lawn weeds wafting in from an unkempt yard, unwanted seeds may land in your gardens and grassy lawns, too! A less conspicuous spread ensues when seeds are washed down storm drains, and the water discharging into parklands deposits the seeds along the way. In both scenarios, the seeds sprout with high germination rates. Left unchecked by their natural Asian predators and parasites, these exotic weeds flourish and crowd out native species. Fortunately, Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteers target rose-of-Sharon thereby ridding the forests of one less weed.

You can help by replacing rose-of-Sharon on your property with any of the above listed native alternatives which both bring beauty and ecological excitement to the landscape. In fact, many native *Hibiscus* blossoms dwarf their invasive cousins, and some of the largest belong to *H. moscheutos*, reaching up to eight inches across! If you must keep rose-of-Sharon, please consider infertile cultivars, such as "Diana" and "Minerva." For all other varieties, kindly bag the seedpods and discard with household waste—not with brush recycling (the seeds can survive composting) and certainly not by dumping in the woods! Would you like to help repair the damage inflicted by rose-of-Sharon to woodlands? Send an e-mail to me asking to join the IMA workday distribution list.

More to read about rose-of-Sharon:

<https://mgmv.org/reading-room/problem-plants/problem-shrubs/problem-plant-rose-of-sharon/>
<http://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/subject.html?sub=5724>

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