

Invasive Plants May Be Top Environmental Issue

UNIVERSITY PARK, (Centre Co.) — The most pervasive environmental threat of the 21st century may be cloaked in the guise of ordinary and often attractive plants, said a horticultural scientist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Most people aren't aware of the ecological damage invasive plants are inflicting on our biodiversity, our wildlife habitat and our native plant species," said Larry Kuhns, professor of ornamental horticulture. "Compared to invasive plants and weeds, the chemical pollutants of the '60s, '70s, and '80s will be considered an easy cleanup."

Kuhns says an invasive plant is defined as a plant that grows aggressively, spreads and displaces other plants in an ecosystem. A small number of invasive species are native to Pennsylvania, which means they grew in the state before settlement by Europeans. Most invasive species, Kuhns explains, were brought to Pennsylvania from other continents. These

species often are called "alien," "exotic," "introduced," or "non-native."

"These plants have been introduced in environments where there are no diseases or pests to control them," Kuhns said. "They often are silent threats because most people aren't aware of invasive plants, or don't notice them spreading into a new environment."

Kuhns says many species now considered invasive originally were introduced intentionally as landscape plants or for other purposes. Kuhns listed 10 invasive plant species most commonly found in Pennsylvania ecosystems.

- Tree of heaven. This tree has invaded many states. It produces a huge amount of seed, which is easily spread by the wind along roadways. It grows very fast — as much as 10 feet in a single season — and can grow more than 60 feet tall. It also spreads by producing new shoots from its extensive root system.

Cruel Humor?

In the pre-teen and adolescent years, a parent's comments said in jest can be taken seriously by the adolescent, causing self-doubt and insecurity.

Said to a young boy, "When are you going to start growing? Your sister is going to beat you," and "Look at the peach fuzz."

Said to a young girl, "Do you think you'll ever have a shapely figure?" "You're just a tomboy, you'll never become a lady."

So-called humor or teasing by a parent is actually worse than slapping a child across the face. It amounts to tearing a young adolescent to pieces while everyone in the family has a good laugh.

Some parents think this kind of humor is good, that "it toughens them up!"

Actually, this primitive kind of humor destroys self-esteem and self-confidence in a child. The child begins questioning his normality and may set out to prove to the "humorous" parent that he is growing up by using cruel humor/actions on his peers, those he sees as superior to himself, by turning to drugs, or other anti-social behavior.

Don't plant the seeds of suspicion in your child. Children are hurt by this bad form of humor. What is needed most is the parent's reassurance that the adolescent is normal, that each individual grows and matures at different times, and that the parent supports the individuality of each child.

Listen carefully to your "humorous" remarks. Physical hurt heals rapidly, but emotional hurt may take years to heal.

- Autumn olive. Introduced as a wildlife cover, this shrub produces large amounts of seed that are widely spread by birds.

- Multiflora rose. This shrub, classified as a noxious weed by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, also was introduced as a wildlife cover. Its seeds are spread by birds. "This plant has a biological control," Kuhns said. "A virus affecting it has spread in the Midwest and has reached Ohio."

- Purple loosestrife. Another Pennsylvania noxious weed, purple loosestrife invades wetlands and sites that have been disturbed or cultivated. Its seeds are easily transported by animals or vehicles. Its vibrant purple flowers and long growing season make it attractive to uninformed gardeners.

- Japanese knotweed. Also

called Japanese bamboo, this plant spreads along rivers and in soil. It grows to nearly 10 feet, but provides little cover or food for wildlife. Its spread by seed is limited, but it has an extensive root system, which makes it difficult to control.

- Phragmites, or the common reed. Common to wetland areas, this plant has native and introduced varieties. It forms huge colonies, pushing out native plants and wildlife.

- Canada thistle. This is a Pennsylvania noxious weed that spreads by airborne seeds. It creates serious problems in farm crops.

- Poison hemlock. Unrelated to the hemlock tree, this herbaceous plant is what the philosopher Socrates mixed into a drink to commit suicide. "It's related to water hemlock, which happens

to be more poisonous than poison hemlock," Kuhns said.

- Japanese stiltgrass. An annual grass, it has invaded woodlands across the state. It has been a hindrance to forest regeneration, Kuhns says.

- Mile-a-minute vine. A Pennsylvania noxious weed, this plant's range is expanding through the state. It can grow six inches a day and more than 25 feet in one growing season. It can smother small saplings and seedlings in developing forests or reforested land.

"Invasive plants threaten the habitat of two-thirds of all threatened and endangered wildlife species," Kuhns said. "The best way to control these plants is to familiarize yourself with them and work with local officials and agencies to start eradication programs."

'Wondeweful' Things Comprise

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Despite some disappointments, hard work and perseverance often pay off. Carrie reported that she was at the bottom of the class in the first showmanship event in which she competed. She confessed that she stood on the wrong side of the sheep when showing it.

She never made that mistake again. By the end of the year, Carrie won the Berks County Junior Showman Award trophy. She also has about 100 ribbons gathered from the shows she has participated in.

Carrie attends Strausstown Elementary School. Her brothers are active in Tulpenhocken FFA, which is in the Hamburg School District.

With all her earnings, Carrie is planning to purchase a horse to ride.

"I have a horse picked out to buy as soon as I sell my steer and market lamb," Carrie said. She also plans to buy another Southdown ewe to increase her flock to eight head.

Carrie has her brother John to thank for introducing the family to raising sheep. John is said to have had no interest in schooling, but "took a shining to sheep." So his

parents purchase a few market lambs and a breeding ewe, and the rest is history.

John also got a Simmental to raise for 4-H competition. Now the whole family is into raising purebred Simmentals.

"Simmentals are the most popular," John said of all beef breeds. "Simmentals have inheritable characteristics—size, big, lean, and good milking mothers."

If it's a black Simmental, they are right up there in placings with Angus, but if it's red, it comes in second.

With the herd, Carrie has a red heifer that she is raising to show.

Her father, Michael, said that state fair funding should be adjusted for fair premiums. He said that kids can make about \$150 a sheep but only \$25 on a steer.

Carrie has one steer and six sheep that she shows at Kutztown, Allentown, Oley, Reading (if they have it), Farmington Fairs, N.J., and Keystone International Livestock Exposition (KILE).

Carrie also participates in lead-line competition at KILE. With the help of her mother, Carrie sews her own outfit and shows a yearling ewe for the lead line competition. Judging is done on the lamb, the outfit of the exhibitor, and the exhibitor's ability to handle the sheep in the show ring.

Carrie takes dance classes twice

weekly. "I love jazz, acro, Polynesian dancing," Carrie said.

She used to do modeling, but dropped it because she did not have enough time.

Another unusual accomplishment for Carrie was holding the record at Allentown Fair for the chin-up challenge in the 14-adult ages. Although she is only 10 years old, Carrie competed in the advanced group and held the title for three days.

Here is the poem that appears in a book. The poet, George Kershvel, who goes by the pen name Willie Everbe Knormale, wrote the poem about Carrie.

Sibling Support

The first-year 4-H freckle-faced kid received more approval than her entry did. The calf was groomed but only graded fair. The kid was shy with long, red hair.

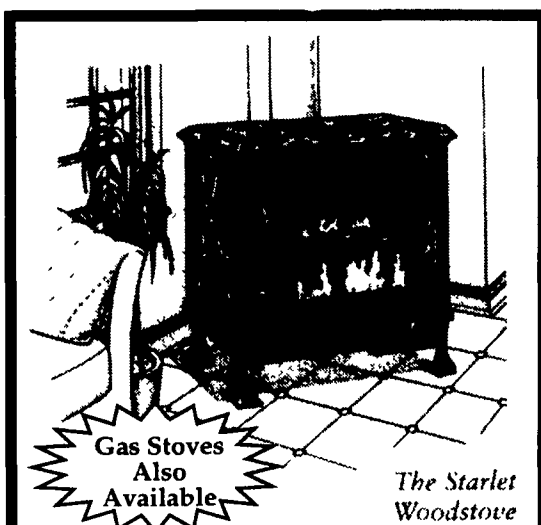
Her two big brothers showed her what to do. She said, "I wanna be good like you."

Well don't show off. Keep him looking neat. Don't let old clumsy go stepping on your feet. If he does a "dirty" when the judge walks by, look the other way—keep your chin high. Smile just a little in the photo line, but don't do that dumb little pantomime.

Now listen here, Sis, whatever you do. Please make Mom and Dad proud of you.

And she sure did — wait 'til next year — she'll be showing a prize-winning steer.

Willie Everbe Knormale



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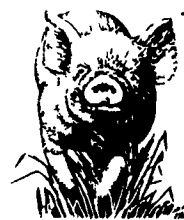
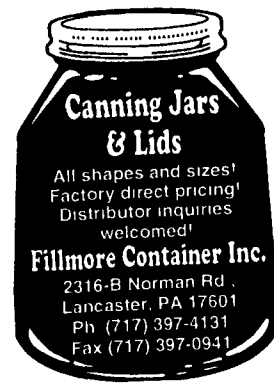
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