



What is that alien in your yard?

Invasive pest and animal species such as the emerald ash borer and Asian carp get all the press, but just about everyone lives with far more common invasive species: trees.

A surprising number of the species of trees found in our streets and yards are considered to have invasive tendencies. Some are considered merely “weedy,” meaning that they send out sprouts nearby to a degree that requires control. Some are thought of as “aggressive,” meaning they reproduce vigorously, crowding out other plants nearby. And truly “invasive” trees are the most serious threat.

An invasive species is a plant or animal species that, when it travels far from its native place, does harm to the local plants, animals, or natural communities by infesting or outcompeting the species that belong there. Such a species can be non-native or native, though there still is some debate over labeling native species as invasive.

In Illinois, several tree species that can be found on just about every city or suburban block are considered highly aggressive, bordering on invasive. For example, black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is a common native tree that is considered invasive by many experts in Illinois and surrounding states.

Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), native to eastern Europe and Asia, is another species, once among the most commonly planted in the nation, which has become unpopular because it sends up so many seedlings. It is widely considered invasive.

More recently, [Callery pear](#) (*Pyrus Calleryana*), a species native to china, and its cultivars, such as ‘Bradford’ pear, have been under scrutiny as a possible invasive species. Increasingly, stands of these trees have been reported in open pastures and forest edges in natural areas, where such non-native trees can disrupt the natural ecosystems.

Much loved for its showy white spring flowers (despite an unlovely aroma) and valued for its compact habit, the Callery pear has been planted in countless yards, along streets, and in plazas and parks. Unwittingly, our love and appreciation of these charming trees can endanger forest preserves and other natural areas.

When they were imported from Asia and planted in our landscapes, no one imagined that Callery pear and Norway maple would cause harm. But now we know they cause disruption and damage far from our home landscapes.

So what can you do? First, identify the trees and other plants that are growing on your property. The Morton Arboretum's Plant Clinic can help you; see mortonarb.org/plantadvice. Learn which are invasive, using such resources as the invasive plant list on invasive.org. If possible, remove any invasive shrubs and perennials and replant with plants that do not pose a threat.

Trees are harder to cope with immediately. But when a mature tree needs to be removed or when you have the opportunity to plant a tree, choose a species that will not be aggressive or invasive. Consider planting native species that are adapted to the local soils and climate and support birds and other wildlife. Spread the message to your community and neighbors about invasive species.

Remember, [invasive species affect everyone!](#)