Monthly Invasive Plant Highlight
MAY 2020

HABITAT Restoration Team
CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

Invasive Plant of the Month: Garlic Mustard

Garlic Mustard (Alliaria petiolata) is also known as Poor Man's Mustard, Hedge Garlic, Garlic Root and Jack-by-the-Hedge. It is an invasive plant found throughout the Northeastern and Midwestern US. It is called garlic mustard because the leaves have a garlic smell when they are crushed.

Garlic mustard is a Eurasian native that spreads very quickly displacing native flowers such as Virginia Bluebells, Trilliums, and Spring Beauty.

Blooming mature Garlic Mustard

Garlic Mustard displaces local native plants and damages insect populations. The plant produces "allelopathic" chemicals that inhibit the growth of other plants and trees around it. The chemicals can kill the larvae of several native butterfly species who try to feed on its leaves. It is a biennial plant meaning it completes its life cycle in two years. The first year it grows a rosette of leaves. The second year, the rosettes grow into a plant that can be up to 3 feet tall. The plants bloom in spring, April through June. The blooms are white.

Please Remove It!

If you find Garlic Mustard in your yard, please remove it. The best way to get rid of Garlic Mustard is to manually pull the plant up by its base to get as much of the root system as possible. Strive to pull up the plants before they set seed, usually by late summer. Discard pulled plants by bagging them up with household waste. Do not put in your compost! A single plant can produce up to 800 seeds in a single season that can remain viable in your soil for up to five years.

More information about Garlic Mustard:

vnps.org/the-root-of-the-problem-garlic-mustard

www.invasive.org/eastern/midatlantic/alpe.html

First year growth Garlic Mustard

Why Native Plants?

As open space disappears, it necessary to look at our own landscapes for biodiversity. Native plants promote the unique relationships between our native plants and animals, from the smallest microorganisms, insects and other invertebrates to birds and mammals.

Native plants, from grasses and wildflowers to towering shade trees, form the base of the food chain. Our native insects are uniquely adapted to eat native plants; some are generalists and can eat a variety of plants, but many are specialists that can only digest certain types of leaves based on the chemistry of the plant.

Research by the entomologist Doug Tallamy has shown that native oak trees support over 500 species of caterpillars whereas ginkgos, a commonly planted landscape tree from Asia, host only 5 species of caterpillars. When it takes over 6,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chickadees, that is a significant difference.

More information on the value of native plants:

www.vnps.org/natives

www.plantnovanatives.org

www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder

www.audubon.org/native-plants

Who We Are?

The City of Falls Church Habitat Restoration Team restores the local ecosystem in city parks. We remove damaging invasive plants then re- plant with natives that benefit our local birds, butterflies, bees, and pollinators.

We are a community task force that supports the City's Green Space department. We have monthly events in the Fall and Spring open to volunteers.

Contact Information

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