

INVASIVE SPECIES IN GEORGIA

What is an invasive species?

Invasive alien species are plants, animals or other organisms that are introduced to a given area outside their original range and cause harm in their new home. Because they have no natural enemies to limit their reproduction, they usually spread rampantly. Invasive alien species are recognized as one of the leading threats to biodiversity and impose enormous costs to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and other human enterprises, as well as to human health.



- The cost to control invasive species and the damages they inflict upon property and natural resources in the U.S. is estimated at **\$137 billion** annually.

Invasive Species in Georgia: A Quick Look

Georgia has been invaded by a number of harmful exotic plants and animals. Here is a quick look at some of the worst invaders:

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Kudzu	Vine	Japan, China; promoted in U.S in 1920s and 30s for forage and erosion control	7 million acres of South, in 24 counties in GA	Grows up to one foot per day! Overgrows and shades out trees, covers houses, barns, road signs
Chinese Privet	Shrub	China; introduced in 1852 as an ornamental	Millions of acres in 20 states	Displaces native plants in wetlands, forests and fields; berries are less nutritious for wildlife than native species
Hydrilla	Aquatic plant	Africa & Southeast Asia; introduced as an ornamental in 1950s	13,000 acres of Lake Seminole	Clogs waterways, restricting recreation; kills other aquatic life by blocking sunlight and using oxygen
Japanese Honeysuckle	Vine	Japan; introduced in 1800s as an ornamental and for deer browse	Found in all of Eastern & Southwestern U.S. 41 counties in Georgia	Inhibits growth of native plants, including three federally listed species; Supports larvae of corn earworm and tobacco budworm (agricultural pests)
Chinese tallow	Tree	China; Ben Franklin sent seeds to a Georgia colonist in 1772	Coastal plains of SC, GA, AL, FL and TX	Displaces native trees; falling leaves contribute to nutrient loading in streams; Oily seeds toxic to cattle
Fire Ant	Insect	South America; accidentally introduced to Alabama in 1930s	300 million acres of Southern U.S.; all of GA except in mountains	Aggressive, multiple biter with painful venom and chance of allergy; may also damage fruits, berries and young crops; also damage electric boxes; ant mounds are a hazard to farm equipment

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Asian tiger mosquito	Insect	Asia & Pacific Islands; first U.S. discovery was in 1986. Breeds in old tires & tree cavities	Established in all counties of Georgia by 1994	Particularly aggressive and irritating biter; also a potential vector for LaCrosse encephalitis, yellow & dengue fevers.
West Nile Virus	Virus	Africa; first reported in New York & Connecticut in 1999	Documented in 67 counties in Georgia	50 human cases and four deaths in Georgia in 2003; also devastating to birds

What Congress Can Do:

A. Make Prevention Our Top Priority

- Reverse current U.S. policy on the intentional import of live plants and animals, that is, switch from a “dirty” to a “clean” list approach that requires screening for invasiveness before import and which keeps out or limits import of species so as to prevent harm to native species or ecosystems – and make the legislative changes to do so.
- Substantially cut the unintentional introduction of aquatic invaders by overseeing federal standard-setting on the discharge of ballast water in the United States, supporting the development of technology to meet these standards; ensuring that agencies monitor and enforce compliance; and reauthorizing the 1996 National Invasive Species Act in the strongest and most comprehensive form.
- When considering, reviewing, or approving trade agreements, rigorously address invasive species, e.g., by allowing for restriction of imports of non-native species that are invasive elsewhere and by identifying pathways by which inadvertent introductions travel so that they may be interrupted.

B. Make Federal Agencies More Effective

- Use oversight authority to ensure that all federal agencies immediately and strongly implement that part of Executive Order 13112 that asks them to identify and reduce actions that introduce or spread invasive species in the United States or elsewhere.
- Appropriate adequate funds so that federal agencies have the resources to address invasive species problems promptly and comprehensively over the long-term.
- Strengthen the structure and leadership of the National Invasive Species Council and prompt more aggressive implementation of its National Management Plan.
- Oversee the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to ensure that the agency and its Administrator are committed to protecting biological diversity as well as agriculture.
- Evaluate the serious problems with border inspection for pests, weeds, and pathogens, e.g., in staffing and cross-department coordination, exacerbated by moving these functions into the Department of Homeland Security and amend its authorizing legislation if needed.

References:

Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council <http://www.gaeppecc.org/exotalk1.html>

Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Plants in Florida

<http://athens.fws.gov/endangered/teplants.html>

Natural Area Weeds: Chinese Tallow http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_AG148

Fire Ants in Georgia http://www.ent.uga.edu/docs/fire_ants_in_georgia.htm

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