

# Backyard Conservation

*Conserving with Nature in Your Yard*

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[plantamillion@hrcd.org](mailto:plantamillion@hrcd.org)

Please send us your name and email address.

A special thank you to everyone who is already receiving it by email!

Each issue is also posted on the Plant A Million website ([www.plantamillion.org](http://www.plantamillion.org)) under News.

## Attracting Backyard Wildlife in the Winter

Shaena Reinhart, Urban Conservationist, Certified Wildlife Biologist

The trees have lost their leaves, the flowers are no longer in bloom, and our creeks and ponds are starting to freeze over. Because of these harsh, winter conditions, many of our wildlife seem to disappear in the winter, hunkered down in their bedding areas or migrating south where it is warmer. Fortunately, there are many wildlife species you can still draw in to your backyard with a few, well-thought-out decisions.

Having food available to our native wildlife in the winter is a vital part of attracting them. Feeders will work, but remember that they need to be filled and cleaned on a regular basis, even when it is cold and snowy outside. To avoid the maintenance associated with feeders, plant some winter food-producing plants, such as hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), and sumac (*Rhus* spp.). These native plantings are more beneficial than supplemental feeders because they can provide shelter and nesting areas for wildlife as well as food.



*Winterberry fruit looks beautiful AND feeds wildlife! Photo courtesy of Hamilton County Urban Conservation*

On the topic of shelter for wildlife, consider ways in which you can provide this habitat component on your property. Evergreens provide great winter shelter, and when planted as a windbreak, can protect your home and yard from wind and snow, which may even reduce your energy bills! Densely planted trees and shrubs and bramble patches such as blackberry or black raspberry groves all provide escape cover for wildlife from predators. Brush piles and rock piles are two manmade habitat components that can add a unique and beneficial type of cover to your landscape. Lastly, consider leaving dead vegetation standing in your flowerbeds, fencerows, or wildflower patches until next spring. This groundcover provides important habitat for ground-dwelling species during cold temperatures.

Water is the last habitat component you will need to provide, and it is possibly the most difficult one to supply in the winter. Freezing temperatures threaten to ice over streams, ponds, and birdbaths, making them inaccessible to our native fauna. Moving water stands a better chance of resisting freezing, so a stream or waterfall will be easier to keep open than a tranquil pond or birdbath. Fortunately, however, there are electric or even solar-powered heaters and circulating pumps that you can put in small water sources to keep them free of ice. Visit your local lawn and garden center to find one that will work with your habitat.

Follow these simple tips to begin creating a winter-wildlife-friendly backyard that will provide habitat for our native critters while providing you with a source of inspiration and enjoyment!



*A small backyard waterfall will ensure the moving water does not freeze over the winter. Photo courtesy of Waterscapes +*

## Invasive of the Issue—A Series of Articles About Exotic Plant Invasives

Bob Eddleman, Director, Plant A Million Program

An invasive species is a non-native species (including seeds, eggs, spores, or other propagules) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic harm, environmental harm, or harm to human health. The term "invasive" is used for the most aggressive species. These species grow and reproduce rapidly, causing major disturbance to the areas in which they are present.

### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT INVASIVE SPECIES:

- Invasive species, if left uncontrolled, can and will limit land use now and into the future.
- The longer we ignore the problem, the harder and more expensive the battle for control will become. The US suffers \$138 billion per year in economic losses due to exotic, invasive species.
- Invasive species can decrease your ability to enjoy hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, boating and other outdoor recreational activities.
- Approximately 42% of threatened or endangered species are at risk due to non-native, invasive species.



*Oriental Bittersweet fruit growing continuously along the plant stems from the axils of the plant leaves. Fruit of the native American Bittersweet grows in larger clusters and only at the ends of branches.*

### ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET

Oriental Bittersweet is a rapidly spreading, highly invasive non-native woody vine that came to the US from Eastern Asia in 1960 as an ornamental plant. It often grows to lengths of 60 feet. The alternate, elliptical leaves are light green in color and 2-5 inches long. Small, inconspicuous, axillary flowers develop in the spring. Fruits are round and green when young and ripen to yellow and split to reveal showy, scarlet berries that persist into winter. It closely resembles American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*), but can be distinguished because American Bittersweet has flowers and fruits at the ends of branches, rather than in the axils of the leaves. Oriental bittersweet is commonly found in about half of Indiana's counties in old home sites, fields, woodland and road edges. Some shade tolerance allows it to also grow in open forests. Prolific vine growth allows it to encircle trees and girdle them. Vines can completely cover other vegetation and shade, out-competing and killing even large trees. It can be dispersed widely and quickly due to birds eating the berries and spreading the seeds. It has also been shown to hybridize with American bittersweet, potentially leading to a loss of genetic identity.

Stems of older plants reaching 4 inches in diameter have been reported. There are separate female (fruiting) and male (non-fruiting) plants. The fruits are three-valved, yellow, globular capsules that at maturity split open to reveal three red-orange, fleshy arils each containing one or two seeds. The abundance of showy fruits have made Oriental bittersweet extremely popular for use in floral arrangements.

Because Oriental bittersweet can be confused with our native American bittersweet which is becoming less and less common, it is imperative that



*A large Oriental Bittersweet vine on a tree along White River in Marion County.*

correct identification be made before any control is begun. American bittersweet produces flowers (and fruits) in single terminal panicles at the tips of the stems; flower panicles and fruit clusters are about as long as the leaves; the leaves are nearly twice as long as wide and are tapered at each end. Oriental bittersweet produces flowers in small auxiliary clusters that are shorter than the subtending leaves and the leaves are very rounded. Comparing the two, American bittersweet has fewer, larger clusters of fruits whereas Oriental bittersweet is a prolific fruiter with lots and lots of fruit clusters emerging at many points along the

stem. Unfortunately, hybrids of the two occur which may make identification more difficult.

### Management Options

Manual, mechanical, and chemical control methods are all effective in removing and killing Oriental bittersweet. Using a combination of methods often yields the best results and may reduce potential impacts to native plants, animals and people. The method you select depends on the extent and type of infestation, the amount of native vegetation on the site, and the time, labor and other resources available to you. Whenever possible and especially for vines climbing up trees or buildings, a combination of cutting followed by application of concentrated systemic herbicide to rooted, living cut surfaces is likely to be the most effective approach. For large infestations spanning extensive areas of ground, a foliar herbicide may be the best choice rather than manual or mechanical means which could result in soil disturbance.

**Chemical Control**—Systemic herbicides like triclopyr and glyphosate are absorbed into plant tissues and carried to the roots, killing the entire plant within about a week. This method is most effective if the stems are first cut by hand or mowed and herbicide is applied immediately to cut stem tissue. Herbicide applications can be made any time of year as long as temperatures are above 55 degrees Fahrenheit for several days and rain is not expected for at least 24 hours. Fall and winter applications will avoid or minimize impacts to native plants and animals. Repeated treatments will likely be needed. Basal bark, cut stem and foliar applications have all been effective as control methods. Additional instructions can be found on the internet. When using any chemical always follow label directions.

**Manual and Mechanical Control**—Small infestations can be hand-pulled but the entire plant should be removed including all the root portions. If fruits are present, the vines should be bagged in plastic trash bags and disposed of in a landfill. Always wear gloves and long sleeves to protect your skin from poison ivy and barbed or spined plants. For climbing vines, first cut the vines near the ground at a comfortable height to kill upper portions and relieve the tree canopy. Try to minimize damage to the bark of the host tree. Rooted portions will remain alive and should be pulled, repeatedly cut to the ground or treated with herbicide. Cutting without herbicide treatment will require vigilance because plants will resprout from the base.

### Alternative Plants

- **American Bittersweet** (*Celastrus scandens*) Although American Bittersweet may seem to be an obvious first choice it is not recommended and should only be used in areas that are completely clear of oriental bittersweet because of the concern for hybridization. Purchase plants from a reputable nursery and verify your purchase. Very attractive for birds.
- **Virginia creeper** (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) This alternative attracts birds throughout the winter and works well as an ornamental.

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It is one of few vines that when it grows against a building does not cause damage.

- **Virgin's Bower** (*Clematis virginiana*) This native perennial plant is a woody vine growing up to 20 feet long. Its stems can entwine about fences and adjacent vegetation, branching occasionally. The stems are initially green or dull red, but eventually turn brown. This plant is visited by various bees, wasps and flies.
- **Trumpet Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*) The native trumpet honeysuckle vine is one of the most beautiful honeysuckle vines in the world. It has a multitude of coral to crimson and yellow trumpet shaped flowers that are very fragrant. It is extremely attractive to our native Ruby Throated Hummingbirds and all butterfly species.

A couple of other native plants to consider planting in areas where the Oriental Bittersweet has been removed are Crossvine and Woolly Dutchman's Pipe.

## Green Site Planning Workshop a Success!

Shaena Reinhart, Urban Conservationist, Certified Wildlife Biologist

Sixty two attendees from various backgrounds attended the "Green Site Planning Workshop: Taking the Myth out of Stormwater Infiltration Practice Design" held in Noblesville on July 29<sup>th</sup>.

This annual workshop hosted by soil and water conservation districts and Hoosier Heartland targets planners, landscape architects, developers, engineers, government employees, and water quality specialists who design projects such as rain gardens. Topics covered all facets of site evaluation and design including initial Best Management Practices (BMPs) selection, soils and engineered soil mixes, and operations and maintenance concerns as well as a site planning design charrette. Also included as part of this workshop was a tour of a highly successful on-site rain garden.



A site planning design charrette was held in the afternoon



Shaena Reinhart, Chairperson of HHRC&D's Backyard Conservation Committee, and Kevin Tungesvick of Spence Restoration Nursery led a tour of the rain garden at the Hamilton County 4-H Fairgrounds.

## IWF's Habitat Stewards Training Program

Travis Stoelting, Habitat Programs Director, IWF



The Indiana Wildlife Federation is once again offering one of its most popular educational programs. The Habitat Stewards Training Program has been reformatted and enhanced to provide participants with a great learning experience, as well as some quality time in the field. The program offers a wide range of information about natural resources and the elements needed to provide viable habitat for wildlife, with an emphasis on Indiana's native flora and fauna. During each session, knowledgeable subject matter presenters will discuss fundamental concepts and current issues related to each topic. Participants are regularly engaged in reviews and discussions to instill a solid understanding of the concepts covered during the training. Sessions are held in a very open format to encourage questions and discussion. Upon completion of the program, participants are certified as Habitat Stewards™ by the National Wildlife Federation.

Becoming certified takes a substantial investment of time and a commitment to learning. Trainees are required to attend seven sessions for a total of 24 hours of training and must log an additional 30 hours of volunteer service. Six of the training sessions are held as three-hour seminars, and one session is a six-hour field day. A variety of topics are covered in the program, ranging from small ponds and butterfly gardens to habitat composition and landscape ecology. Group activities, assignments, and a field day provide demonstrations of the concepts covered over the course of the training.

Because of the program's in depth subject matter and intensive group learning, it is well worth the investment. In addition to the knowledge gained through the program, participants become part of a network of experienced volunteers. Having access to a network like this is very helpful when resources are running thin on a project. In fact, IWF is now encouraging groups that anticipate a future need for volunteer resources to enroll in a Habitat Stewards training and take advantage of the opportunity to start building these relationships in advance.

Conservation education continues to be a major focus of the Indiana Wildlife Federation. In the fall of 2010, several interested groups and individuals decided to further their environmental education by signing up for the new incarnation of the Habitat Stewards Training Program. IWF is proud to offer such a program that will lead to a better understanding of, and hopefully an increased interest and capacity for, the conservation of our natural resources.

For more information regarding the Habitat Stewards Training Program contact: Travis Stoelting, Habitat Programs Director at [stoelting@indianawildlife.org](mailto:stoelting@indianawildlife.org).



Bill Hostetler, an experienced soil scientist, dug into the soils to show the group what he had lectured about earlier in the day.



## Helping Residents Protect Our Water

Harold Thompson, Ag Liaison, Eagle Creek Watershed Alliance

Each day, conservationists across the country are teaching youth and adults the concept that we all live in a "watershed." "Watershed" may be a new term to you, but it simply means any area of land that water flows across or through on its way downhill to a larger water body. The actions of people living in that common land area can positively or negatively affect the natural resources and water quality. If you live near the Eagle Creek Reservoir on Indy's west side you may be more familiar with this concept than most since it is a drinking water source for hundreds of thousands of citizens.



Photo credit—www.visitindy.com 2010

Earlier this year, I was selected to be the agricultural liaison with a group called the Eagle Creek Watershed Alliance. Groups like Eagle Creek are springing up all over Indiana. They are made up of private citizens, organizations, businesses, and agencies that care about the area in which they live and want to make a difference. The Eagle Creek Watershed is a multi-land use area – which means we have farms and woodlands, cities and towns, schools and parks – all which contribute to potential water quality pollution within the watershed.

The Alliance is working in partnership with the Center for Earth and Environmental Science (IUPUI) and through this partnership, grant dollars are available to help private landowners. As ag liaison my job is to work one on one with the farmers in the area talking with them about their natural resource concerns and use of chemicals, nutrients, and other potential pollutants. Past experience has indicated that many of the conservation practices needed to keep soil in its place and protect the water quality of the watershed area are also profitable to the farmer, especially when cost share dollars are made available to help offset the initial installation cost of the practice. We have also found that many agricultural practices fit well in urban and residential areas as well and help improve our water quality. The practices include nutrient management, sediment filters, erosion control, critical area treatment, etc.

The ECWA cost-share program pays up to 75% for approved practices for agricultural and urban/residential practices. For more information about the ECWA cost-share program visit the website – [www.eaglecreekwatershed.org](http://www.eaglecreekwatershed.org) and look under the "Get Involved" tab. The website provides general information about the cost share program, fundable best management practices (BMPs), and areas of the watershed where funding is available. You can also contact the coordinator at [info@eaglecreekwatershed.org](mailto:info@eaglecreekwatershed.org) or contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District (see your county government pages in the phone book). The ECWA would like to work with you with to improve local water quality.

The Backyard Conservation Newsletter is a product of Hoosier Heartland's Backyard Conservation Committee. Geneva Rawlins serves as the editor. The newsletter is technically reviewed by a team of professional conservationists. Hoosier Heartland is a not for profit, 501c3 organization run by volunteers serving Central Indiana for over 40 years. Our mission is to help people learn to care for, protect, and manage their natural resources in a way that improves the economy, environment, and quality of life for residents in Boone, Brown, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Marion, Monroe, Morgan, and Shelby Counties.



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