

ABOUT THOSE FLOWERS on the side of the road...

by FRANCESCA RAMOS



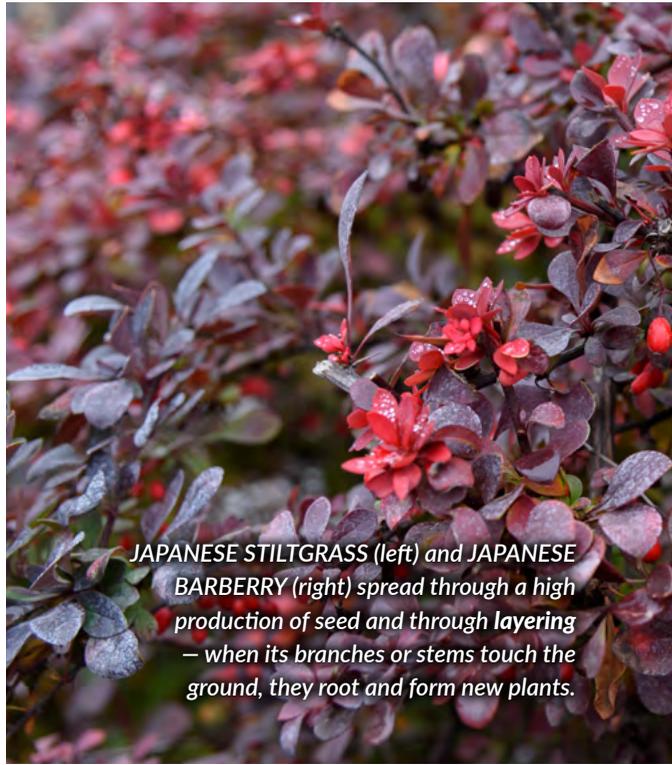
INVASIVE SPECIES are exotic plants and animals that have been introduced into native ecosystems. They displace native species which can impact the diversity of native plants and animals, reduce wildlife habitat and disrupt important ecosystem functions.

Have you ever thought about those plants on the side of the road — the wildflowers? Did you ever imagine they could be dangerous for our environment and the animals that live among them?

During my time at the Wildlife Leadership Academy, I have had the opportunity to learn about numerous plants and their purpose in nature. What intrigued me about the plants was the fact that many of them are not supposed to grow here and, in turn, they can destroy the habitats of wildlife like deer, grouse and birds. These plants are called invasive and rightly so because of the vigorous and effective way they take over the forests and areas surrounding them, even your backyard.

Although it may come as a surprise, Queen Anne's Lace, a beautiful plant that many children pick to give to their mother, is a poisonous weed that is harmful to Pennsylvania's environment. At the Wildlife Leadership Academy, I was tasked with finding and pressing a series of individual plants. While picking the plants, I realized that Queen Anne's Lace was everywhere. It grew in abandoned fields, on the sides of roads, and pretty much anywhere there is room for it to grow. Native to temperate regions of Europe and southwest Asia, this subspecies of wild carrot has been carefully monitored here so that it does not take over too much forest land where trees and other

A biennial plant, QUEEN ANNE'S LACE will bloom and set seed in the second year. One plant can produce up to 40,000 seeds that can be transferred on coats or dog's fur.



JAPANESE STILTGRASS (left) and JAPANESE BARBERRY (right) spread through a high production of seed and through layering – when its branches or stems touch the ground, they root and form new plants.

native plants can potentially grow.

Two other invasive plants I found are native to Japan: Japanese Barberry and Japanese Stiltgrass. They can be found in home landscapes and forests. Although the Japanese Barberry may be an excellent plant for landscape designers because it “...exhibits a high ornamental value and responds well to pruning...” according to the Ecological Landscape Alliance, it offers no benefit to the wildlife here in the U.S. It grows and spreads, taking over and killing native species of plants that are supposed to

flourish and provide for the various animals in the area.

Japanese Barberry shrubs can grow to be quite tall compared to Japanese Stiltgrass, the small grass plants that can be found nearly everywhere in the forests around northeastern and central Pennsylvania. Japanese Stiltgrass creates an inhospitable environment for native species, animals and plants alike, because it alters the natural soil conditions.

It would be almost impossible to remove all invasive species. Careful attention to the spread of invasive species and regular removal are needed to continue to provide for the needs of wildlife.

GO NATIVE IN YOUR GARDEN! Native plants grew here before Europeans arrived, therefore they are perfectly adapted to the Pennsylvania ecosystem. Native species are hardy, easy to grow and provide the best possible habitat and food for local wildlife.

Francesca Ramos is a sophomore at North Pocono High School. She is a 2019 alumnus of the Drummers Field School of the Wildlife Leadership Academy.