

A thorny problem: INVASIVE MULTIFLORA ROSE

Brodhead Watershed Association

In June, if you drive local roads with the windows open, you're likely to notice a sticky-sweet fragrance as you pass overgrown banks of greenery. That is multiflora rose — a hyper-prickly rambling rose with tiny, fleeting white flowers.

For years, it was promoted as a “living fence,” a way to keep livestock from roaming. Some highway departments planted multiflora rose in highway medians with the idea of reducing headlight glare from on-coming traffic and also as a fast-growing, dense crash barrier.

This non-native, invasive plant can quickly kill desirable native shrubs, small trees and fruit trees. It leafs out early in spring and uses other plants as a living trellis, climbing up and over and blocking sunlight from the canopies of shadbush, crab apples, dogwoods, and other desirable plants.

Unfortunately, multiflora rose is prevalent in our area — along stone rows, in abandoned fields and crowding the edges of woodlands. If you have this pest in your garden, eradicating it takes time, but can be done.

Here's how to beat back Multiflora Rose

The best time to control multiflora rose is before the plant flowers. Cut back the messy growth, protecting your face and eyes and wearing long, heavy gloves. Then cut the stump 6 to 12 inches above the ground. The plant will sprout, spending a lot of energy re-growing. Then in August cut the sprouted stem back to one-inch above ground and paint it with straight glyphosate herbicide. This gets the plant to waste a lot of its stores of carbohydrates in sprouting, making it a very effective method.

If the plants are too difficult to pull out or dig out, you can cut them down to a one-inch stump any time in summer before the plant's bright red berries (hips) start to appear. Paint the stump with straight glyphosate herbicide. The plant will try to reappear next year, but if you keep after the new growth, you'll succeed.

A good alternative to plant in place of multiflora rose is witch hazel — a large native shrub which has bright yellow flowers in fall and provides cover for birds in winter. Other possibilities are winterberry holly, arrowwood viburnum and American hazelnut.



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