



**Buckthorn**



**Callery Pear**



**Purple Loosestrife**



**Teasel**



**Honeysuckle**



**Reed Grass**

It was suggested that I interview Cathy McGlynn, Ph.D., who has offices at the Chicago Botanic Garden and is also working on a community-based invasive elimination project in DuPage County. She has contacts with IDOT, ComED, NICOR, and local governments and county agencies that help report and control invasives. I have never done an interview before and leapt at the chance. She agreed to do an interview via email and this is the result. It was a pleasure to meet her this way and she has some very interesting things to say:

**1. Would you tell us a bit about your background and your organization. What are the objectives of your group and what is the focus?**

A: I have a Ph.D. in ecology with an emphasis on biological invasions. My dissertation focused on the impacts of purple loosestrife and common reed on native plants, small mammals, and birds in freshwater tidal wetlands. I am a former field biologist.

The mission and goals of the Northern Illinois Invasive Plant Partnership (NIIPP) are to prevent and control new plant invasions, control and manage current invasions, support informed management decisions, and raise public awareness concerning the threat posed by invasive plants. Our goal is to minimize the adverse impacts invasive plants have on our open lands and waters in northeast Illinois, especially on native habitats and their native plants and wildlife.

Our programs focus on prevention, early detection and rapid response, and control/management. I currently work on education and outreach about new and common invasive plants and invasive ornamental plants, early detection and rapid response for Hydrilla (not yet here, but coming) and several new invaders like Japanese stiltgrass, and aquatic invasive species through Clean Boats Crew. I also help coordinate and fund control and management projects across jurisdictional boundaries.

**2. What are the top few invasive plants affecting us right now, and how do they impact our environment.**

A: By "top" I'm guessing you mean "most prevalent." Some of the most prevalent invasive plants in our region right now are common buckthorn, glossy buckthorn, teasel, honeysuckles, and common reed. All but common reed were brought here as ornamentals.

Invasive plants have many impacts on the environments they invade. For example, common buckthorn produces a chemical in its roots (and leaves) that inhibits growth of plants around it. Soil is kept in place by the roots of plants. When heavy rains occur in ravine habitats where buckthorn has invaded, a lot of soil is readily picked up and carried down into streams that are tributaries to Lake Michigan thus affecting water quality and habitats for native aquatic plants and animals.



**Cathy McGlynn, Ph.D.**

In addition, plants form a foundation for food webs in habitats. When native plants are displaced by invasive plants, the animals that evolved with the native plants need to go elsewhere for food and shelter. In turn, the animals that consume the insects, birds, small mammals, and herps that use native plants are also impacted. All these organisms are interconnected, which is why invasive plants can have such far reaching effects.

**3. It is easy for us to see what garlic mustard and purple loosestrife are doing to our native plants, choking out the things we want to keep, but I was surprised to see Bradford pear on the list. I understand it has been planted on the highways and interstates and seems to be spreading quite a bit. With the exception of the aesthetics, making the roadways look messy, what other problems is it or will it cause, if not checked?**

A: Callery pear and many of its cultivars, including Bradford pear, displace and outshade native plants in habitats with sunny, well drained soils. Many of the Callery pear cultivars do not remain sterile if they hybridize with one another (or if one plant is grafted on another). The tree is valued for its easy maintenance and early spring blooms, but it

produces fruits that are eaten by birds, carried considerable distances, and then deposited. Infestations have been reported at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Morton Arboretum, and multiple sites in DuPage County. The homeowner fact sheet for this plant can be seen at <http://niipp.net/files/niipp/files/2011/01/Callery%20pear%20homeowners%20fact%20sheet%20FINAL.pdf>.

**4. What do you recommend that we tell die-hard fans of purple loosestrife who insist that it is not a problem with them? I went to a garden club meeting, and the speaker was advocating planting this invasive plant to attract butterflies; and he claims that he sells the plants every spring. What can we do to combat this type of practice?**

A: Purple loosestrife is illegal to sell, purchase, or trade in the State of Illinois (read the Illinois Exotic Weed Act at <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1735&ChapterID=44>). In order for a cultivar to be exempted from this Act, data would have to be provided that demonstrates its sterility. No cultivars are currently listed as exceptions to the Illinois Exotic Weed Act. As for not seeing new purple loosestrife plants sprouting near the parent plants owned, a single purple loosestrife plant produces several million seeds that can be transported by wind, water, on animal fur, in soil stuck in hiking boots, etc. Therefore, offspring can be found miles away from the parent plant. Education and awareness are key in dealing with this type of practice, but they are no guarantees of its cessation.

**5. Can you give us, as those avowed to preserve our natural resources and sworn to practice conservation, some ideas to employ in furthering your objectives? What would you like garden club members to do?**

A: Become aware of how to identify and report plants that are invasive in your region.

Become informed about ornamental plants that have or will become invasive in our region.

Just because something is available at a nursery or a garden center does not mean that it is not invasive. Try to incorporate native plants in at least part of your garden, and choose non-invasive plants for the rest if that is to your liking and if you are unwilling to go completely native. **Please give the native birds and butterflies a fighting chance.**