

## **Invasive Plant Species by Rebecca Lexa**

As the weather improves, many of us head out into our yards and gardens. Many of these are a mix of native and non-native plants, sometimes on purpose, but often by accident. Some non-native plants are relatively benign, more of a mildly obnoxious weed to be pulled than a serious threat. But some are much more aggressive and can cause serious problems, and are known as invasive plants.

Scotch broom is a prime example. This shrub is made of bundles of long green stems with small round leaves; its spring flowers are yellow, sometimes with a bit of red. Another plant with yellow flowers is gorse; it's covered in sharp, thorny leaves which are very unpleasant to touch! Both of these can take over large areas of land in just a few short years. So can Himalayan blackberry; unlike our native trailing blackberry, which has slender vines that creep along the ground, this invasive grows thick canes with sharp thorns that can grow taller than a person.

Not only do invasive plants crowd out natives, but they don't offer as much to local wildlife. Native plants, on the other hand, provide flowers for pollinators, and more crucially they provide leaves and other greenery eaten by animals ranging from caterpillars to deer. If you want to increase the amount of wildlife in your yard or garden, take out as many of the non-native species as you can, and replace them with a variety of native plants. You may not see every single creature that benefits from your ecological upgrade, but you will do them a world of good!