

## New Exotic Weed Act bans sale, planting of three plants in Illinois

It is now illegal in Illinois to buy, sell, offer for sale, distribute or plant the seeds, parts or whole plants of Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*).

The three species have been declared exotic weeds and are banned under the new Illinois Exotic Weed Act, which was passed in 1987 and went into effect last fall.

Noting that "these plants spread quickly and become serious problems when they are planted", Conservation Director Mark Frech urged in a personal letter to nursery operators across the state that they take the new Exotic Weed law into account when ordering 1988 stock.

Frech pointed out in his recent letter that violators of the act are subject to a fine of up to \$500 and/or a six-month jail term. When a violation is a continuing offense, each day is considered a separate violation.

Exotic weeds offered for sale within the state also are subject to confiscation and destruction by agents of the Department of Conservation, unless the plants and sales are specifically exempted, Frech explained.

The exemption to which Frech alluded was the law's approval of commercial propagation of the three species for sale outside Illinois.

John Schwegman, head of the Conservation Department's Botany Section, also points out that while the law prohibits new plantings, it does not require landowners or homeowners to remove existing plants. However, the plants may not be sold or transferred for re-establishment elsewhere.

At least two of the three plant species, Japanese honeysuckle and multiflora rose, originally were propagated here as answers to other problems. Later, however, it was discovered their drawbacks outweighed their benefits. It is not recorded how, when or why purple loosestrife was first planted here, but the species was known to have existed in the eastern states for decades before its relatively sudden burgeoning into a menace there and its subsequent migration to Illinois.

Japanese honeysuckle, spread largely by birds, is a woody vine that rapidly smothers out native vegetation with its thick, clinging growth. It is an especial threat to endangered plant species. Originally, it was introduced as a planting to stabilize roadsides, but it also has been used for ornamentation.

Multiflora rose was touted for years in Sunday supplement ads in newspapers all across the nation as an excellent wildlife habitat planting, for use as a living fence, as a property line marker, fencerow planting, soil stabilizer and a variety of other uses. However, expansion of the thorny shrub is rapid, impossible to control and very difficult to totally halt. The species grows and spreads underground through its root system, and eventually crowds out all competition. Because of its thorniness, one cannot pass through it and the plant is difficult to circumvent. It has become a substantial problem in natural areas and on agricultural land.

Despite its beauty and colorfulness, purple loosestrife has become a serious and prolific invader and destroyer of wetland areas in Illinois. It has no natural competition and now threatens to choke out many of the state's most pristine wetlands, upset ecological balances and destroy many plants and animals.

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