

Compost with Care:

How to dispose of invasive plants responsibly



DOOR COUNTY
Soil & Water
Conservation
Department



Invasive species threaten our environment, economy, and in some cases even our health. As you begin spring cleaning around your home and garden, be aware that composting certain invasive plants with other yard waste and/or brush (including that set out for municipal pick-up) may enable their spread to new locations.

The table below describes options for the disposal of several types of invasive plants and examples of plants that are known to Door County. Understanding how a plant reproduces and disperses will help you determine what is safe to compost and when. Be aware that controlling different invasive plants may warrant manual, mechanical, or chemical (herbicide) methods. Selecting a proper control method will depend on a number of factors including the plant species, the time of year, and the size of the population. For more information on how to identify and control invasive plants on your property, visit the Door County Invasive Species Team's webpage at <http://map.co.door.wi.us/swcd/invasive/>. In addition, keep an eye on the public access channel for upcoming information on invasive plant species to watch for.

Type of Plant	Examples	Disposal Methods
Trees, Shrubs and Woody Vines	Japanese barberry Exotic honeysuckles Common buckthorn Glossy buckthorn Oriental bittersweet Multiflora rose Autumn olive	Before flowering: Small seedlings can be pulled and left with the roots exposed to dry out - once fully dead and dried they can be composted or left on site. Larger plant material (without fruits or seeds) can be chipped and used as mulch on site, but only added to compost once fully dead and dried. You can dry plants by covering above and below with dark tarps for several weeks. During or after flowering: DO NOT COMPOST - Instead, minimize the movement of the plants on the site to prevent unnecessary dispersal. Leave them at the site or bag for disposal in a landfill*. Brush piles may be made from dried material, however if material contains flowers or seeds, cover the pile to prevent spread by birds and other organisms. Dried plant material can also be burned, but ONLY in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws and ordinances.
Herbaceous (non-woody) plants that spread by seed	Dame's rocket Garlic mustard Black swallow-wort, Hound's tongue Wild parsnip Common Teasel	Before flowering: Plants may be pulled and left with the roots exposed to dry out. Once fully dead, it can be composted or left on site. NOTE: Wild parsnip should be handled with extreme caution! When sap contacts skin in the presence of sunlight, it can cause severe rashes, blisters, and discoloration of the skin. Wear gloves, long sleeves, and long pants when handling. During or after flowering: DO NOT COMPOST OR MULCH. Minimize the movement of the plants on the site to prevent unnecessary dispersal and remember that seeds are often spread by wind, water, animals and people. Bag flowering heads and allow to rot in a sunny location for several weeks, then dispose of in a landfill* or burn in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws and ordinances. Cut stems (without flowers/seeds) may be left on site.
Herbaceous (non-woody) plants that spread by plant parts**	Japanese knotweed Phragmites Reed Canary Grass Purple Loosestrife Spotted knapweed Exotic thistles Leafy spurge	DO NOT COMPOST THESE SPECIES because they have rhizomes or other parts that may survive in compost and spread to new locations when compost is distributed. Use of these plants in brush piles is also not advisable unless a plastic or other barrier is added to prevent the plants from contacting the ground and re-rooting. The best option for disposing of these plants should be landfilling* or burning in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws and ordinances.

*While landfilling of yard waste is generally prohibited in Wisconsin, the Department of Natural Resources is allowing the landfilling of invasive plants because it represents the best available option property owners may have for disposing of them. Plants to be landfilled should be placed in clear, plastic garbage bags labeled "invasive species". ** Plant parts include stems, roots, rhizomes, bulbs, tubers, root fragments or buds.

Japanese Knotweed



One plant to know is Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) – a perennial plant with an increasing presence around the City of Sturgeon Bay. This herbaceous plant spreads rapidly and can cause costly damage to homes and other structures when its thick roots systems push through pavement or foundations. You can identify this plant by its large arching, reddish, bamboo-like stems (top) that can grow up to 10 feet tall. The stems will persist through the winter after the above-ground portions of the plant die back (center). Knotweed will bloom in the late summer and will have numerous creamy white flowers (bottom) that will emerge from where the leaf attaches to the stem.

Though it produces seed, Japanese knotweed mainly spreads by rhizomes (horizontal, underground stems). Any relocated piece of the rhizome may start a new population. The best options for disposing of Japanese knotweed is landfilling in a clear, plastic bag labeled “invasive species” or burning in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws and ordinances. This is a difficult plant to control, but using one of these methods will prevent it from further spreading in your garden or hitching a ride to your neighbor’s property via compost.

Garlic Mustard

Also spread through compost is garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), a non-native biennial plant. It starts from seed and grows close to the ground as a rosette during its first growing season (right, top). These first year plants overwinter and being to grow again the following spring, generally before many of our native plants emerge. The second year plants (right, bottom) flower in May or early June and produce large numbers of sticky seed that can remain alive in the soil for years. Both the first- and second-year plants smell strongly of garlic when the leaves are crushed between one’s fingers. Garlic mustard can easily be pulled, but the plants can re-root if left on the ground or disposed of in a compost or brush pile – this plant is best bagged for landfilling.



For additional information on the proper disposal of invasive plants visit:

Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin (IPAW) at http://www.ipaw.org/invaders/garlic_mustard/disposal.aspx

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection & the University of Connecticut,

“Guidelines for Disposal of Terrestrial Invasive Plants” at http://www.hort.uconn.edu/CIPWG/pdfs/Invasive_plant_disposal_guide_8-2011.pdf

University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension , “Methods for Disposing of Non-Native Invasive Plants” at

http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000988_Rep1720.pdf

This information has been provided to you by The Door County Soil & Water Conservation Department and The Door County Invasive Species Team (DCIST). The mission of DCIST is to empower citizens with the education, tools and skills necessary to control invasive species. If you have questions about invasive species or how you can help in the battle against them, contact DCIST at 920-746-5955 (message line) or dcist1@gmail.com. More information is also available at our webpage, <http://map.co.door.wi.us/swcd/invasive/>.



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