

Jumping the Fence or Being Thrown Over It?

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The focus of invasive plant work is shifting more and more towards the topic of Garden Thugs. These are the seemingly attractive plants we put in our gardens for beautification, only to find out their aggressive behavior can get pretty ugly. Garden thugs crowd out everything else in the flower beds, can move into the lawn, the driveway (even paved ones), crawl up the sides of (or even inside) your house, take fences and trees down, and display other sorts of bullying behavior that cause damage and cost time and money to manage. Sounds like a science fiction B-movie, doesn't it? "Attack of the English Ivy", coming soon to a home near you.

These plants are not aware of boundaries and begin quietly moving out of one yard into adjacent property.

Disagreements between neighboring gardeners arise. What if the adjacent property is a natural area or a park or some other public land? Since it's a natural area that looks wild, wouldn't it seem perfectly ok to throw your plant trimmings and yard waste over your fence into this "wild" area? How about on a dead-end street or a road shoulder? It's natural and biodegradable waste after all, right? Not necessarily so. This type of yard waste can also be considered Biological Pollution. Some of the plants and trimmings that are being disposed of in areas of low to no maintenance are taking root where they are tossed. Introducing another species this way can monkey-wrench an ecosystem and cost taxpayers and landowners money when the plants begin to take over or cause damage, and need to be removed. Some examples of most commonly tossed plant materials include English ivy (*Hedera helix*), yellow archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*), and goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria*). For example, yellow archangel is used in hanging baskets often, and is often spread when the basket is dumped out in the fall, or if the vines grow long and root themselves into the ground beneath the basket. This plant is showing up more and more in our parks and along roadsides, creeks and riverbanks as a result of yard waste dumping.



Yellow archangel escaping into natural area from a roadside dumping site on Lake Whatcom Blvd near Sudden Valley

There are things we can do to avoid and curb the growing problem of invasives running amuck in our natural areas:

- First, be careful of what you plant in your garden. Use that "ounce of prevention" to your advantage. For a good start, get acquainted with the current Noxious Weed and Prohibited Plant Lists. <http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds/weedlist.jsp>
- Or Google a scientific plant name on the internet with the word "invasive" and see if you come up with invasive plant/pest websites.
- If you already have a thug in your garden, remove it. If you need help figuring out the best way to do so, contact the **Whatcom County Noxious Weed Board, 360-715-7470**.
- When you remove it, dispose of it at Bellingham's "Clean Green" transfer site (only \$4 a truckload), the curbside yard waste pick up, or other commercial disposal or composting facility. See this link for more information: <http://www.cob.org/services/environment/recycling.aspx>
The plant you remove may not be suitable for backyard composting because it may not get hot enough for a long enough period of time in your compost pile. You could end up with weedy, unusable compost.
- Please don't share your thug throwaways with friends and neighbors. If a plant is unruly and rampant in your yard, it will likely behave the same way in your friend's yard. Remember: Friends Don't Give Friends Invasive Species.
- If you would like some suggested alternative plants to those botanical bullies, a booklet titled "Garden Wise: Non-Invasive Plants for Your Garden" is available for **free** at the Weed Board office: 360-715-7470. A July 2008 revised edition is now available.