

Fighting Invasive Plants

Did you know there's a big fight going on in the plant world? Plants are fighting to keep their homes!

Plants that have always grown in a certain area are called native plants. That means they have lived in that area for hundreds or even thousands of years. Native plants are important. They are homes and food for the insects and animals that live in the area. They also help animals, birds, and insects that travel, or migrate, through that area. The animals and plants depend on each other.

But in some areas, new plants are trying to take over. They are called invasive plants because they are new to the area and spread quickly. Some of these plants were planted by gardeners who thought they were pretty. Some were planted to keep soil in place.

Kudzu is one example of an invasive plant in the United States. The kudzu is a vine that is native to Asia. It was planted in response to a time of hardship for people in the Southern Plains in the United States. About 100 years ago, people in the Southern Plains suffered through a period of serious drought. The natural grasslands had been replaced with crops, but the crops died in the drought. The dry weather and poor planting methods caused huge dust storms. Flying, swirling clouds of dirt killed people, animals, and crops. This time period was called the Dust Bowl.

After the Dust Bowl, people wanted to prevent dust storms. So, in the southern part of the United States, they planted kudzu. People thought these plants would help hold the soil in place. It was planted for a good reason, but now it grows out of control in some areas. During the spring, kudzu can grow up to one foot per day! It can grow over trees and bushes and kill them. Now, people in the south are working to get rid of kudzu in some areas.

Other plants are causing problems near the Great Lakes. In Indiana, groups of volunteers work to take care of the sand dunes near Lake Michigan. In between the lake and the dunes is a wetland. Wetlands are areas of land that stay wet most of the time. They are important! Wetlands help clean the water that flows from the land to the lake. They help prevent floods, too. And they are home to many plants and animals that live nowhere else on Earth.

More than 100 different invasive plants are causing problems in Indiana. These invasive

plants include reed canary grass, spotted knapweed, Japanese brome, and others. They killed off native plants and drove away some of the animals. Volunteers and scientists have been working to get rid of those invasive plants. And it's working! Frogs and toads are coming back to the wetlands. With people's help, native plants and the animals they support can win the fight for their homes.

These conservation efforts are supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), which specializes in bringing together individuals, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and corporations to restore our nation's fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats for current and future generations.