

My Life Experiences with Invasive Plants in Dunn County, Wisconsin
Mame Gale
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I moved permanently to Dunn County in 1980. My husband John and I lived in New Haven Township. There was a non-native, invasive plant established at the corner of the garage that we called bamboo (Japanese or Bohemian knotweed). It grew 5-7 ft. high, from the ground up every year and didn't spread because we mowed around it. I got interested in landscaping as time went on and we planted many trees and shrubs around the property over the years. I would share the "bamboo" plants as they emerged in the spring with friends and family. I would tell them it grows quickly and spreads so one could hide an unpleasant foundation. So that's what I eventually did. I planted some in front of the barn to hide the foundation. That was a big mistake as the plant took over and made a great mess. Fortunately, I never saw it grow through cracks in the cement foundation. It eventually got treated with an herbicide chemical and it withered.

After 16 years we moved to Menomonie Township in 1996 and still both of us paid no attention to invasive plants. I was always happy to see the common buckthorn in the spring because it was green and signified warmer days to come. John became very interested in medicinal plants. He planted many in the garden along with vegetables and fruits. I remember common teasel, valerian, common St. John's wort, echinacea, black cohosh, skullcap, boneset, blessed or holy thistle, elecampane, compass plant, virgin's bower, goldenseal, German chamomile, hyssop, self-heal/heal-all, milk thistle, motherwort, angelica and comfrey. We both liked to forage and discovered ways to use some of the native and some non-native, invasive plants on our property like chickweed, curly dock, quackgrass, dandelion, plantain, mullein, stinging nettle, jewelweed, etc. I remember him planting pasture mixes containing bird's-foot trefoil, blue vervain, timothy, crown vetch, smooth brome and red clover. We built a trellis 110 ft. long and 10.5 ft. high and then planted European hops, wild yam, Red Swenson grapes, Chinese wisteria, vining honeysuckles, virgin's bower and Dutchman's pipe *Aristolochia tomentosa* at the base of it. We would order from the DNR, wildlife packets that contained crabapple, oriental bittersweet and Tartarian honeysuckle. I always have liked ornamental plants and we established oriental bittersweet and pampas grass around metal sculptures that my brother-in-law created.

I decided to join The Prairie Enthusiasts and quickly became the Secretary of our local chapter, the Chippewa Savannas in 2013. My neighbor, Mark Leach, was a member and PhD botanist came over for a consult about how I could get started managing my property to attract pollinators, especially monarch butterflies. My cousins near Waterloo, Iowa had established a monarch butterfly way-station and would, and still do, tag monarchs every fall. I continued to admire the row of Tartarian honeysuckle planted years ago along a fence line attracting the birds and the goldenrod and monarda growing in the fields.

After John passed away, in 2006 I had Jay Jordan, the DNR Forester at the time, come to review my 32-acre MFL plan and showed him an unusual tree on the corner of the property that was multi-trunked and had spongy, corky bark. He identified it as a Chinese cork tree, and we left it at that. Also, that year I had pine trees thinned on about 10 acres. In subsequent years I noticed a lot of red elderberry growing under the thinned pines which made it practically impossible to walk through. Then the buckthorn came in under those pines too.

Then in 2013 Kathy Stahl and Kathy Ruggles came over for a site-visit. They were the President and Vice-President of the Chippewa Savannas at the time. What they saw and I learned I had was common buckthorn and garlic mustard in abundance. Kathy S. informed me of a new group called West Central Wisconsin Invasive Plant Management Area (WCWIPMA) now Lower Chippewa Invasives Partnership, Inc. (LCIP) that meets to learn, discuss and share information about invasive plants with landowners in the community. Once I learned about all the different invasive plants, I realized that John and I had unknowingly contributed to the problem. Before I started on any prairie development, I first had to take care of the invasive plants especially the ones that produced berries.

I started to go to the invasive plant meetings held by WCWIPMA and invited members to a garlic mustard pulling party here in 2014. While folks were here, I showed them two plants in the woods that looked foreign. One turned out to be non-native, invasive Japanese barberry. I discovered that it had been spread from a bush on the corner of my house by birds eating the berries and scattering them. Then I discovered many more barberry shrubs in the woods. The other plant was a tree that had unusual corky bark, but this tree had a tall straight trunk. We all looked at it and I said that there was another corky tree nearby as well. John and I had noticed it and thought how interesting it was as it flowered in the spring and produced berries, which we thought were good for wildlife. It also had a neon yellow inner bark that was striking.

Chris Gaetzke is the one who identified it as the Amur cork tree and discovered that it was introduced into this country from China and was a recently listed prohibited invasive plant in Wisconsin. We learned that there are males and females and only the females produce berries. We determined that the large multi-trunked cork tree was a female and in November 2015 I had it cut down. We counted 34 rings on the stump that was already 30 inches wide! I did not treat the stump with herbicide chemical as an experiment to see how it tries to re-sprout. In the spring of 2016, I had the other large straight-trunked tree cut down into 9 ft lengths and I did treat that stump with chemical. Then I had it cut into boards as I had learned it was rot-resistant and may work for outdoor decking. The wide rings on the boards showed how fast growing it is with up to 6-10 ft a year in high sunlight conditions. Searching around the property with a pocket knife to score the bark on specimens to see the yellow inner bark showed that I had the tree growing all over the place. Kathy Stahl learned that the males can produce berries in the absence of a female, so I took action.

I worked with LCIP to do a preliminary study to see density of these trees in their second generation. The research said the areas could have up to 540 trees/acre. They can end up colonizing an area. So, I then looked for assistance to help control these trees before they got any more ahold of my property. I learned that I could get cost-sharing assistance from the NRCS to help cover some of the expenses of controlling these invasive species. I signed a 3-year contract in 2016 and each year I would take care of a certain area.

Many of the plants that John planted in the garden are now gone, but a few are still problematic. The European hops have jumped into the woods as has the elecampane. The Dutchman's pipe, even though I mow around both sides of it on the trellis, is sending runners underground and it's now coming up in a field where I don't mow regularly.

Over these past five years I have, with the help of tree services, college students through a LCIP-WDNR Rapid Response grant and 4-Control, Inc. worked on removing black locust, Tartarian honeysuckle, common buckthorn, oriental bittersweet, Amur cork tree, Japanese barberry, garlic mustard, Chinese wisteria vine, & wild parsnip among others.

I was going to try to inoculate black locust logs with shitake mushroom spores but learned that is not a good wood for mushrooms because of the toxins in the wood. This past summer I did inoculate Amur cork tree stumps with oyster mushroom spore and will see this year if any mushrooms fruit from it.

I'm looking forward to planting native trees and shrubs around where invasives once were, to bring balance back to the whole ecosystem here on 510th Street near Menomonie. I'm inspired by and recommend Douglas W. Tallamy's book, *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*. The journey is ongoing, and I am moving forward.