

# Starvation and woe

## The ecological impact of invasive plants

BY REBECCA LEXA

Scotch broom, English ivy, Gorse, Popweed and butterfly bush are just a few of the invasive species of plants that can be found in the Columbia-Pacific region. How did they get here, and why are they such a problem for local ecosystems?

Native animals, plants, fungi and other living beings in this region evolved together over thousands, even millions of years. Over time, they developed interrelated networks so complex that it's often difficult to grasp just how crucial one species can be to another. For example, if one species on a food chain is removed, the chain can collapse, then other species struggle, and the local extinction of one seemingly insignificant animal, plant, or fungus can have significant ripple effects throughout an entire

ecosystem.

In recent centuries, the Pacific Northwest's ecosystems have undergone much destructive change. Widespread logging, mining and agriculture coupled with pollution, development, and the growing effects of climate change have caused significant change for flora and fauna.

While invasive plants may seem to be less threatening than the clearcutting of old growth forest or the draining of wetlands for yet another parking lot, these non-native species do cause difficulty for nature. When native plants aren't able to establish themselves in a disturbed natural area because invasive plants are crowding them out, the area's ecosystem may take longer to recover from damage. Even worse, native ecosystems may disappear.

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Rebecca Lexa

The bittercress plant is commonly seen between fall and spring along the North Coast.

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