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Book Review

Problem Plants of Ohio

Griffiths ME, Davis MA, Ward D. 2020. Problem plants of Ohio. Kent (OH): Kent State University Press. 392 p. 7 × 10 in., hardback. $65.00.
ISBN-13: 978-1-60635-402-5.

Problem Plants of Ohio describes the issue of invasive plant species that disrupt native ecosystems—plus the intricacies of plant biology and invasion trajectories. This work illustrates the difficulty of predicting trajectories of exotic and invasive species, and the possible effects of climate change. The majority of the book contains two-to-three-page entries with essential historical, diagnostic, ecological, and management information about the current major invasive species in the state, plus a few watch-list species.

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The book begins with a concise introduction into the what, where, how, why, and what can be done about invasive plant species. Following chapters are divided by physiognomy: grasses, forbs, creepers and climbers (i.e., woody and non-woody vines), shrubs, trees, and aquatic and wetland plants. Each chapter includes a description about that physiognomic group, and the particular challenges of invasive species in that group. The species entries within the chapter are organized by plant family in alphabetical order. Each species entry includes information on its history, likely introduction vector, identifying characteristics (including beautiful photographs), impacts, and (briefly) control methods.

The impact section of each invasive species entry was particularly informative. When managing invasive species, one of the first questions asked is "what is the action threshold for treatment?" When should you act and what do you consider an acceptable level of invasion? As the treatment is considered, knowing species-specific impacts will drive the answer to these questions.

This leads into the control section for the species. The authors illustrate the nuances of the invasive species; they describe not only effective treatments, but ways treatments can exacerbate the problem. Rightly, the authors are adamant throughout the text about the safety and legality of some treatment methods, and advise the reader to seek professional assistance when faced with certain control methods.

The book is formatted similarly to a field guide, and meant to be read in pieces as well as whole. That being said, there are occasional species entries that do not cross-reference each other in both directions. This could pose a problem with identifying similar species without reading the text from front to back.

This book would be particularly useful for recreational naturalists and those in fields (or aspiring to the fields) of conservation, natural resources, parks and recreation, agriculture, landscaping, and horticulture. The "Native Alternatives" box in many species entries seems formulated particularly for those in landscaping and horticulture, who are looking to combat the invasive plant-species problem. Although focused on Ohio, many of the species are prevalent in the Great Lakes and New England regions of North America. As such, this book could be used as a reference if the area lacked one.

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The book is intended for an audience familiar with plants and plant anatomy. It contains significant botanical jargon that is explained in the text and in a glossary, but the jargon is so frequent that a reader without some previous exposure may become overwhelmed. The entries are also sorted by family within the physiognomy chapters. This organization may delight biologists, but a novice or layman may struggle to find the species they seek.

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