

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Understand and Avoid Potentially Invasive Plants

Over the last week, the Kansas Department of Agriculture has reported several Kansas residents receiving unsolicited packages of seed that appear to have originated in China. It is unknown what the seeds are or why the seeds were sent, but the KDA warns to not plant any of the seeds. It is unknown at this time if the seeds are for invasive plants, and if they are, there are negative ecological and agricultural implications in planting them. If you receive a similar package, do not throw the seeds away and if they are in sealed packaging, do not unseal the packaging. Call the Kansas Department of Agriculture at 785-564-6698 to file a complaint and get instructions on how to proceed. Keep shipping labels and all other relevant packaging for documentation.

Invasive plants are species that are introduced intentionally or unintentionally to a country outside of their native range. Not all introduced plants are invasive though – only plants that cause significant ecological or economic harm are invasive. These plants thrive in the area they are introduced due to a lack of predators or pests, fast growth that outpaces native plants, and the ability to spread rapidly, often with the help of native herbivores. Some invasive plants, such as Russian olive and garlic mustard, can be used by people and have their invasive traits reduced. Research into the potential invasiveness of exotic plants is important when determining new landscape plantings.

Plants are often introduced for a variety of reasons. The previously mentioned garlic mustard was introduced from Europe because of its health benefits, and in the realm of horticulture, most introduced species are brought over because of their superior ornamental traits. Examples of ornamental introduced plants include the crape myrtle, weigelas and daylilies. Some introductions also serve to control introduced plants, bringing over a natural predator of these plants as a means of population reduction. However, with any introduction, care must be taken to ensure that the impact to native plants is minimal or non-existent.

Many of the most common horticultural pests we see in the lawn and garden are the result of unintentional introductions. These species often arrived among plant shipments in the early 1900's before commodity imports were regularly inspected. One such pest is the Japanese beetle, which is estimated to have been imported into New York in a shipment of irises in 1912. Today, Japanese beetles are present in 43 of 50 states and are an annual headache for gardeners, defoliating over 300 species of ornamental and food production plants. Dutch elm disease and chestnut blight are two diseases introduced from the eastern hemisphere that ravaged native elm and chestnut trees due to their lack of immune defenses to the foreign pathogens. Dutch elm disease is estimated to have killed 40 million native elm trees since its introduction, and chestnut blight is estimated to have killed 4 billion trees. Because of chestnut blight, the American chestnut is now a critically endangered species. When selecting plants, understand disease cycles and symptoms, so that you can curb infestations from unwanted plants, pests, and diseases.

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