



TORONTO MASTER GARDENER

INVASIVE PLANTS FACT SHEETS

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GOUTWEED

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THE INVASIVE SPECIES CENTRE



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GOUTWEED

(Aegopodium podagraria)

WHAT IS GOUTWEED

Goutweed is an herbaceous perennial plant, native to Europe and northern Asia which was first brought to North America during the early stages of European settlement as an ornamental garden plant.

It is distinguished by its very vigorous, aggressive habit. It reproduces primarily through its widely spreading, much-branched rhizomes, which produce dense patches. While it tolerates both full sun and partial shade and a variety of moisture conditions, its seeds need full sun and recently disturbed soil to survive

after germination - so reproduction by seed is not usually a problem. Some cultivated forms have variegated leaves, the leaflets being green near the centre but whitish around their margins. These are usually less aggressive than forms with entirely green leaves. The plant is particularly competitive in shaded sites where it smothers native species and prohibits their growth.

WHY IS GOUTWEED A PROBLEM

Goutweed is an aggressive invasive plant that forms dense patches, displaces native species, and greatly reduces species diversity in the ground layer. Goutweed patches also inhibit the establishment of conifers and other native tree species. It appears to do best on moist soil and in light to moderate shade but is highly shade-tolerant and capable of invading closed-canopy forests. In Eurasia, goutweed is primarily a species of deciduous and southern boreal forests, and it expands aggressively in similar habitats in North America. For these reasons it is considered an ecological threat.



IDENTIFICATION

Leaves are basal and are divided into three groups of three leaflets. The leaflets are toothed and sometimes irregularly lobed or divided. The natural plant is a light green colour, although some cultivated forms (often seen in garden centres) have variegated leaves, the leaflets being green near the centre but whitish around their margins.



Flowers occur between May and June and are tiny and white, arranged in compound umbels (flat topped clusters), which are held above the foliage on leafy stems (the flowers look similar to Queen Anne's Lace).



MANAGEMENT FOR THE TORONTO GARDENER

It is very difficult to eliminate goutweed by hand digging. Small patches of goutweed may be removed by careful and persistent hand-pulling or digging up of entire plants along with the rhizomes. Plants will generally break off at ground level if pulled and even a small piece of rhizome can re-sprout into a new plant (this may be avoided if soil is dug to a depth of 2 feet (60 cm) and screened to remove roots and rhizomes but this is very labour intensive). However, with persistent pulling the plants carbohydrate reserves should eventually be exhausted. Roots and other reproductive parts should be disposed of by bagging and putting in the trash (reproductive parts of invasive plants should not be included in yard waste).

Another highly effective method is to smother the plants. If deprived of light the plant will be unable to photosynthesize and will eventually die. This may be done with either a weighted tarpaulin or thick mulch on top of cardboard. This may take one to two years to be effective. A final option in areas with full sun is solarization. Ideally this will take place over four to six weeks during hot summer months. Cut the goutweed to ground level, water the ground deeply until wet, and cover the area with clear plastic. Use caution with this method as the heat can kill or damage other plants including trees or large shrubs whose roots extend beneath the area.

If you see goutweed or other invasive species in the wild, please contact the Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711, or visit [EDDMapS Ontario](http://EDDMapS.Ontario) to report a sighting.

ALTERNATIVE NATIVE PLANTS

There are many attractive native ground covers which can be used as alternatives to goutweed. These include:



WILD GINGER

(*Asarum canadense*)



WOODLAND/WILD STRAWBERRY

(*Fragaria* spp.)



BIG LEAF ASTER

(*Aster macrophyllus* syn. *Eurybia macrophylla*)



CANADA MAYFLOWER

(*Maianthemum canadense*)

REFERENCES

Credit Valley Conservation, Goutweed, accessed at: <https://cvc.ca/your-land-water/tree-planting-and-habitat-restoration-services/invasive-species/invasive-species-spotlights/invasive-plants-spotlight/goutweed-aegopodium-podagraria/>

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<https://www.ontarioparks.com/documents/content/10/172>

PHOTO CREDIT

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