Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Goutweed
Aegopodium podagraria

Description:
Goutweed is an herbaceous perennial with branching white rhizomes and compound basal leaves, the latter which can be green or variegated in color. In mid-summer, tall leafy stems produce flat-topped clusters of white flowers.

Biology and Spread:
Goutweed spreads vigorously by vegetative means, extending its rhizome system to form large colonies. Establishment by seed requires recently disturbed soil and rather bright light conditions.

Ecological Threat:
Goutweed is aggressive, forming dense, impenetrable patches that displace native plants and greatly reduce ground-layer species diversity. Its colonies also inhibit the establishment of native tree seedlings. Highly shade-tolerant, it is capable of invading closed-canopy forests.

Background:
Goutweed was brought to North America as an ornamental by early European settlers. By 1863, it was well established in the United States. It is utilized as a low-maintenance ground cover.

Range:
Native to most of Europe and northern Asia, goutweed can now be found in the Northwest, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States.

Habitat:
A species of deciduous and coniferous forests in its native Eurasia, goutweed invades similar habitats in North America. It does best in moist soil and light shade, but is versatile and shade-tolerant. It is often found in disturbed habitats such as logged forests and abandoned fields.
How to Control this Species:

Physical
Small patches can be eliminated through persistent hand-pulling, careful to remove under-ground rhizomes. Rhizomes should be bagged and disposed of to prevent reestablishment.

Frequent mowing at short heights can control or slow the spread of goutweed. Doing this early in the year just after the plant has fully leafed out, and covering the entire colony with black plastic sheeting afterwards, is a great way to exhaust its energy reserves.

Chemical
Systemic herbicides, such as glyphosate, are most effective for goutweed control because they are translocated to the roots, killing the entire plant. Contact herbicides are ineffective because goutweed readily leafs out after defoliation.

Be careful not to damage or kill nearby native plants when using herbicides and always follow the instructions on the label.

References:

Plant Conservation Alliance’s Alien Plant Working Group:
http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/aepo1.htm

USDA Forest Service:
http://www.invasive.org/weedcd/pdfs/wow/goutweed.pdf

For More Information:

DCNR Invasive Species Site: http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm

Native Alternatives:

Many versatile native ground covers are available.

Canadian Anemone
W.D. Bransford
www.wildflower.org

Wild Sarsaparilla
Joseph O’Brien, USDA Forest Service
www.forestryimages.org

Dwarf Crested Iris
W.D. Bransford
www.wildflower.org

Leslie J. Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut
www.forestryimages.org