

# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Multiflora Rose

*Rosa multiflora*



Leslie J. Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut  
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### Background:

Multiflora rose was introduced into the United States as ornamental rootstock from Japan in 1866. Beginning in the 1930s, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service promoted it for use in erosion control and livestock fencing. It was also encouraged in wildlife plantings and as a crash barrier along highways. Recognition of its tenacious and unstoppable growth habit came too late, and it is now considered a noxious weed in many states.

### Range:

Native to Asia, multiflora rose now occurs throughout most of the United States, especially the eastern half.

### Description:

Multiflora rose is a dense, thorny shrub, reaching up to 15 feet in height, with arching canes (stems) that are capable of rambling up trees. Its leaves are pinnately compound, divided into seven to nine leaflets, and finely serrate. Clusters of fragrant white to pink flowers appear in May or June. Small bright red hips (fruit) develop during the summer and remain on the plant through winter.



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### Habitat:

This invasive shrub has a wide tolerance for various soil, moisture and light conditions. It can be found in dense woods, along stream banks and roadsides, and in open fields and prairies.

### Biology and Spread:

It is estimated that a single plant may produce a million seeds per year, which may remain viable in the soil for up to 20 years. The hips are readily eaten by birds, which are the primary seed dispersers. New plants can also be formed by rooting from the tips of canes touching the ground.

### Ecological Threat:

Multiflora rose forms impenetrable thickets that exclude native plant species. This shrub grows very prolifically in riparian areas, where its inedible leaf litter can change the composition of the aquatic macroinvertebrate community. Its occasional habit of climbing can weigh down trees, making them susceptible to breakage.



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## How to Control this Species:

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### Physical

Frequent cutting or mowing, three to six times per growing season, for two to four years, is effective in achieving high mortality. Be careful – the strong thorns have been known to puncture rubber tires.

Scattered populations may be eliminated by complete removal of the plants. Be sure to remove all root material because this shrub readily re-sprouts.

In areas where multiflora rose is detected early, prescribed fire may limit its establishment.

### Chemical

Application of herbicides, such as glyphosate or triclopyr, on freshly cut stems is an effective control method since it destroys the root system and prevents re-sprouting. This may be done during the dormant period, which reduces the likelihood of damaging desirable species.

A foliar spray of fosamine can be used from July through September, but die-back will not be apparent until the following summer. Fosamine will only affect woody species.

### Biological

Biological control is currently under investigation. Rose-rosette disease, a native viral pathogen, is spread by a mite, and is slowly spreading eastward from the west. The European rose chalcid, a seed-infesting wasp, promises to reduce seed viability. Unfortunately, both of these measures have the potential to impact native rose species.



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## Look-A-Likes:

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Multiflora rose could easily be confused with other rose species (both native and non-native), especially when not in bloom. This is a concern, since some native species are of conservation interest.



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## References:

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*Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group:*  
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/romu1.htm>

*Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources:*  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives/fact/rose.htm>

## For More Information:

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*DCNR Invasive Species Site:* <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservation/science/invasivespecies/index.htm>

*DCNR Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers:*  
[http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/Multiflora\\_rose.htm](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/Multiflora_rose.htm)