

# JAPANESE CHAFF FLOWER INVASIVE OF THE MONTH!

HANNAH CHAFFEE

Que the dramatically timed lightning and organ music! Nothing is spookier than invasive plants. Japanese Chaff Flower is the newest invasive species to arrive in Athens, having recently been identified at Memorial Park and Bear Hollow Zoo.

Japanese Chaff Flower (*Achyranthes japonica*) is a perennial (regrows each year) herb which grows 3 to 6 ft tall. It's simple smooth-edged leaves grow opposite to each other, and it's flower grows in a green spiky column with no petals. In the colder months, it's stem turns brown but remains upright ([Michigan Invasive Species](#)).

That doesn't sound like a good Halloween costume, you say. And you'd be right! But like something out of the Little Shop of Horrors, this plant is nothing to turn a blind eye to.



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DIFFERENT INVASIVE SPECIES!



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Invasive species threaten ecosystems because they tend to outcompete native plants for resources like nutrients, sunlight, space or water. They grow and spread quickly. In the case of the Japanese Chaff Flower, its dense colonies of tall plants crowd out other species and block light. Japanese Chaff Flower is particularly prolific when it comes to seed dispersal, producing thousands of seeds per square meter ([West Pennsylvania Conservancy](#)) which can be transported downstream by floods or unknowingly carried to an entirely new location by sticking to animal fur or mowing equipment.

Japanese Chaff Flower seeds can easily stick to cloths or dog fur, so be sure to check yourself and your fluffy companion if you walk outdoors, disposing of any seeds into the trash (in a sealed container).

More often than not, invasive species like the Japanese Chaff Flower relocate, not because of a natural introduction to a new region or gradual growth in a species' range but because humans introduced it — and usually it's



unintentional.

The spread of invasive species disrupts our delicate ecosystem, decreasing biodiversity which results in tangible effects on how we live. We rely on the ecosystem to manage runoff and erosion, provide clean water, pollinate crops and so much more. That's why it's crucial that we take steps to stop the spread of Japanese Chaff Flower before it becomes a wide spread issue in Athens.

You can help by reporting any sightings of the plant. Japanese Chaff Flower can be easily confused with other species, and we want to track where populations currently are in Athens. If you see a plant you think is Japanese Chaff Flower, don't mow it: snap a picture and call or email the ACC Sustainability Department. We will help confirm the species identification and advise options for treating it.

We appreciate your haunting dedication and hope you stay tuned for more hair-raising tales of ecology!



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