

Invasive Wisteria

INVASIVE SPECIES OF THE MONTH

CHRISTIAN SNEAD

Have you been wondering what those pretty lavender flowers draped all over town are? The ones that smell really good and make you smile at what you think is a sign that Spring has finally sprung? Well, we've got bad news. The flowers you've been admiring are Wisteria, and it's an invasive vine. Once sought out for their cascading blooms and ability to shade porches and gardens, Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*) and Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*) have become highly invasive across the southeastern U.S. These aggressive vines outcompete native plants and damage and kill trees.

How to Identify Invasive Wisteria

Identifying Chinese and Japanese wisteria from each other can be tricky, but studies have shown that most of the invasive wisteria plants growing in the southeast United States are hybrids, so just knowing the basic identification points is enough. Both species are climbing, woody vines that coil upwards and twist around whatever supporting structure they choose. The stems are covered in fine, white hairs, and the fruit appear in the form of green to brown seedpods with a velvety texture. The pods are anywhere from 4-6 inches long with round seeds inside. It is important to note that the seeds are poisonous.

Chinese and Japanese wisteria are both tolerant of a variety of soil conditions, they prefer full sun, but will grow and persist even when shaded. Infestations are common along roadsides, in ditches, and along forest edges.

CHINESE WISTERIA



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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, BUGWOOD

JAPANESE WISTERIA

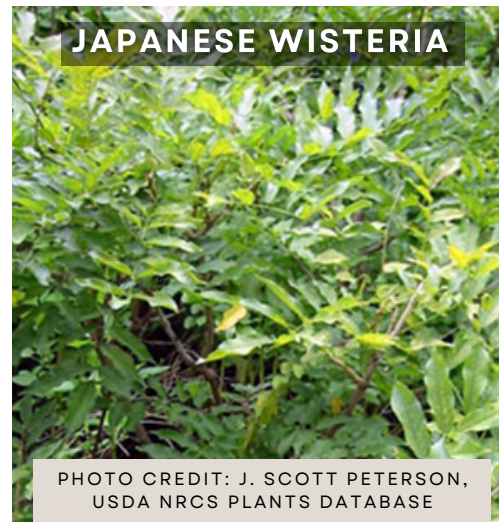


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Wisteria strangles and covers surrounding vegetation. As it grows up host trees, it winds tightly and girdles them by cutting through the bark and severing the vascular tissue, ultimately killing the tree. Vines that grow along the ground form dense thickets that readily shade out and smother native vegetation.

Both invasive species of Wisteria can be controlled with the same methods. Cutting vines near the bases of trees (or as close to the ground as possible when treating vines that are not climbing a structure) and treating them with a systemic herbicide like glyphosate or triclopyr works to kill the roots. The vines above the cut will eventually dry out and die—don't attempt to pull down vines that are outside of your reach. Be sure to apply the herbicide directly to cut stump within 5 minutes of cutting. Wisteria plants can re-sprout multiple times after cutting, so diligent follow-up treatments will be required. It's best to treat wisteria before it begins producing seeds.

CHINESE WISTERIA

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JAPANESE WISTERIA

CHINESE WISTERIA

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CHINESE WISTERIA

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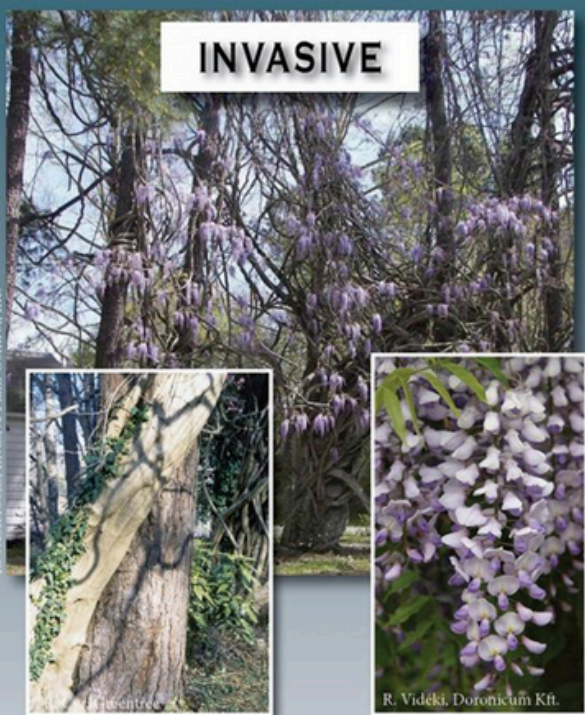
There is a native Wisteria, American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*), and it can easily be mistaken for Chinese or Japanese wisteria if you are unsure how to identify these species. Some helpful tips for telling the American species apart from the Asian varieties are that the Asian varieties bloom in the spring (April/May); American wisteria tends to bloom in June and July. American wisteria flowers are also more densely clustered together (like a pinecone) in comparison to the long, looser pendulum of flowers seen in Asian varieties. The seed pods of American wisteria are smooth and hairless as opposed to the pods of Asian wisteria which are velvety and hairy. The leaf tips of American wisteria tend to be blunt.

Chinese and Japanese wisteria may be lovely, but their rapid spread poses a real threat to native plants and trees. By learning how to identify and manage these vines, we can help protect our landscapes from being overrun.

If you spot wisteria growing unchecked in your yard, consider taking action to keep it from spreading—it's a small step that makes a big difference!

#KNOWTHEDIFFERENCE

Exotic wisterias will readily hybridize with each other and are difficult to distinguish. Native wisteria will not hybridize with exotics and maintains a lower profile.



exotic wisterias

(*Wisteria sinensis*, *W. floribunda*, hybrids)

- Very aggressive growth- climbs up to 40 ft. in height;
- Seed pods velvety, covered in short hairs;
- Less cold-tolerant, blooming in Spring typically;
- Clusters of flowers growing to 20 in. in length.



American wisteria

(*Wisteria frutescens*)

- Will climb, but has more shrub-like growth tendency;
- Seed pods smooth and hairless;
- Blooms slightly later in year (June-July); will sometimes bloom again in fall;
- Clusters of flowers are shorter, rounder, more compact (shaped like a pine cone).



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