



# Non-Indigenous Species: Activities for Youth

Non-indigenous, exotics, introduced and non-native are all terms used to describe plants and animals that are living outside their natural geographic boundaries. Thousands of exotic plants, animals and microbes have been introduced into the United States. Some of these organisms have been intentionally imported for use in agriculture, the pet industry and fish and wildlife management. Others have been accidentally introduced from ships' ballast water, in packing materials and soils, or as hitchhikers on other plants and animals. Many exotic species, such as soybeans and wheat, have been beneficial and contribute significantly to the economy. Others, such as the gypsy moth and kudzu, have a negative impact. In addition, plant and animal species from the Americas have been exported to other parts of the world, with similar effects. Once established in new environments, many exotics displace native plants and animals, alter ecosystems, cause disease and interfere with human activities in industry, agriculture and recreation. The zebra mussel is a good example of a recent introduction which has caused untold damage to surface water users. Exotics typically leave their natural enemies behind, upsetting nature's system of checks and balances, and giving them an unfair advantage in their new homes. With time, an equilibrium is re-established, frequently, to the detriment of the native species.

Examples of exotics present in the southeast which you may have seen or are familiar with are: imported fire ants, kudzu, water hyacinth, hydrilla, boll weevil, cogongrass, Eurasian water milfoil, nutria, honeysuckle, tilapia and the zebra mussel. Others like the Asiatic clam, purple loosestrife and gypsy moth have yet to be identified in this area. The activities and resources in this packet will guide you to a better understanding of what exotics are and how they may impact you. Fact sheets for selected exotics are provided to expedite the learning process. Youth are challenged to create their own fact sheets of other exotics that are common to their area.

This manual contains three types of activities. First there are introductory or awareness building activities. The second type focuses on both beneficial and detrimental characteristics of exotics. And finally there are activities intended as reinforcers. The best advantage can be gained from this set by selecting at least one introductory activity, several from the second set and following up with the routine monitoring of a non-indigenous species in your community. We strongly recommend the activity, Exotic Watch, be used as an ongoing activity and notations made throughout the year. The activities were designed for primary students, however they are appropriate for any grade level where awareness of exotics is lacking. The study of exotic species is probably not appropriate for the early elementary grades.

Please consider this set of activities as work-in-progress. As you see additional needs and gaps, or errors, please let us know and we will make additions and/or corrections.

For a copy of the [full report](#), you may download it in portable document format.

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