

## What You Can Do

Japanese stiltgrass can be tough to eliminate, due to its high seed output and spreading habit. The seeds lay dormant for years in the soil. Manual pulling of the grass, while effective in the short term, disturbs the area and can lead to germination of the seeds. Be prepared to repeat the process until the seedbank is exhausted.

Mowing can also be helpful. If possible, you'll want to mow in the late summer when the plant is just flowering but before it sets seed. Again, you'll have to repeat the process; Japanese stiltgrass is primarily an annual in our area, so repeated mowing and not allowing seed production will eventually "tire it out". You might think that deer would be helpful, but since they tend to seek their preferred native food, they can actually exacerbate Japanese stiltgrass spread! Herbicides are effective, but seek a professional for advice on how to apply them and control this aggressive plant.



*Pennsylvania sedge*  
Source: Sylvan Gardens

Great native alternatives to plant once you rid your landscape of Japanese stiltgrass include:

- Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
- Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*)
- Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)
- Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*)

The Invasive Species Committee may be able to provide some guidance, possibly help, and would like to know about any Japanese stiltgrass in town. To contact the committee, send email to:

***invasive@grotonma.gov***

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# INVASION ALERT!

## *Japanese Stiltgrass*



*Japanese stiltgrass growing at the Groton Town Forest (left) and closeup of foliage (right)*

Groton has been invaded by a foreign plant: Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*). Since hitching a ride to the USA in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it spread throughout the eastern states. stiltgrass spreads easily via seeds and forms a mat that outcompetes native plants along trails, roads, and in the forest understory.

The purpose of this flyer is to show you what it is, how to identify it, and what you can do about it.

# Description

Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) is native to and widespread in Asia. It was used as packing material for porcelain; this was the likely source of its introduction to the USA in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Closeup of seedhead  
Source: Cornell University



stiltgrass is a prolific producer of tiny seeds that are easy to spread. In addition to dispersal by wind and water, hikers and bikers can unknowingly carry the seeds with them along roads and trails. Once established in these disturbed areas, the aggressive plant spreads both by seed and horizontal stems called stolons, moving into its preferred shade. There it forms dense mats that outcompete native plants in the forest understory.

Japanese stiltgrass mats are generally 1-3 feet tall, but when conditions are right the plant can reach 6 feet tall. The seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 5 years. Japanese stiltgrass can also produce allelopathic chemicals, killing off other plants. It's one tough cookie! Once stiltgrass is established, the associated reduction in biodiversity can be dramatic.



Stiltgrass mat in forest  
Source: Penn State Univ.



Carolina (L) and Mitchell's (R) Satyr butterflies

Interestingly, Japanese stiltgrass is now a host plant of some native southern and midwestern butterflies. Native hosts would be superior for the butterflies' reproduction.

# Identification

Japanese stiltgrass looks like delicate bamboo with a sprawling growth habit. The leaves are 1-3 inches long, asymmetrical in shape mid-rib that's off-center, and are arranged alternately on the stalk. The leaves are shaped like a lance with a prominent stripe of silvery, reflective hairs on the upper leaf surface. These hairs can help with identification: Most native grass leaves are rough in one direction when rubbed, but Japanese stiltgrass leaves are smooth in both directions.



Closeup of leaf  
Source: Maine Natural Areas Program



Prop or "Stilt" roots  
Source: Urban Forest Alliance

So why is it called stiltgrass? The stems feature roots that grow down from a leaf node to the soil and prop up the plant like a stilt. This is another diagnostic feature that helps distinguish Japanese stiltgrass from our native grasses. However, there are some "look-alikes" to watch for.

## Watch out for look-alike native grasses!



Whitegrass aka Virginia Cutgrass  
Sources: iNaturalist, Native Plant Trust

*Leersia virginica*, aka Virginia or white cutgrass or whitegrass, has rough leaves and hairy leaf nodes.

*Dichanthelium clandestinum* or Deer tongue grass leaves wrap its hairy stem.



Deer Tongue Grass  
Sources: Univ. of Illinois Extension