What You Can Do

Multiflora rose is a prickly character. Small plants are relatively easy to remove, but large infestations are formidable. Multiflora rose seeds have great longevity in the seed bank and can be carried in by birds, so ongoing vigilance is required.

- As with all roses, multiflora rose can be a carrier of sporotrichosis or "rose gardener's disease." For this reason particularly, thick gloves are recommended for protection from the thorns.
- Small plants can be pulled from the ground with relative ease, as the roots aren't particularly deep.
- Large individual shrubs may be dug from the ground after chopping or sawing through the larger roots, though ongoing maintenance may be necessary to remove sprouts from remaining root fragments. A shrub removal tool such as the Uprooter or Weed Wrench™ can be effective.
- For heavy infestations, repeated mowing can bring success. A program of 3-6 mowings over 2-4 years is recommended to suppress regrowth.
- For extreme infestations over large areas, some have had success with “brush hogs”, “brushmonsters”, and other forestry machinery.
- Goats can and will eat multiflora rose, unlike the invasives Japanese barberry and burning bush. Allowing goats (or possibly sheep) to graze an infested area can be effective.

Herbicide is the most effective method of eliminating multiflora rose and preventing regrowth, but herbicide use is beyond the scope of this brochure.

Some attractive native New England alternatives for your garden are the aforementioned Carolina rose (*Rosa carolina*), swamp rose (*R. palustris*), Virginia rose (*R. virginiana*), and the edible black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*) which also produces white flowers from May to June. Smooth hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) is a beautiful and thornless native option.

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

invasive@townofgroton.org

Copyright 2018, Town of Groton Massachusetts Invasive Species Committee
All content may be freely copied, with attribution appreciated.

INVASION ALERT!

Multiflora Rose

A large multiflora rose showing white flowers and the characteristic arching branches, and a closeup of the leaves

Groton has been invaded by a foreign plant: multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*). This tenacious perennial in the rose family proliferates on roadsides, forest trails and edges, parking lots, and any unmanaged space, where it crowds out native species. It forms impenetrable thickets of arching branches with large curved thorns, which easily snag on unwary passersby. The prolific seeds are spread by birds, quickly colonizing new locations.

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

Description

Multiflora rose is multi-stemmed, arching shrub that can grow 10-12 feet tall when in full sun. It has long branches with alternating compound leaves. Each leaf has 5-7 small (1/2-2”), rounded, sharply toothed leaflets.

The thorns (technically "prickles") are large, recurved, and very sharp. Clusters of small, fragrant flowers, typically white but occasionally pink, arrive in the late spring. After flowering, small red fruits or "rose hips" appear and persist through winter. Multiflora rose can also behave as a vine, enveloping trees and other objects.

Close-up of thorns

Multiflora rose grows quickly and spreads by seeds, underground root systems or rhizomes, and by growing roots from the branch tips when they eventually reach the ground. It can also regenerate from cut stems and root fragments.

Multiflora rose hips are widely eaten and spread by birds, though their nutritional value is lower than those of natives such as the Carolina rose (*Rosa carolina*), swamp rose (*R. palustris*), and Virginia rose (*R. virginiana*). One multiflora rose plant produces up to one million seeds per growing season that can stay viable for up to 20 years. Multiflora rose grows aggressively, chokes out natural habitats, inhibits regeneration of trees, and potentially threatens bird nesting areas. It has a wide tolerance of soil types and growing conditions. This is one formidable rose!

In the 1860s, multiflora rose was introduced to the USA as an ornamental plant, erosion control, and a "living fence" for livestock. It is also used as grafted rootstock for more showy, ornamental rose varieties- watch your prize roses for new growth shooting up from the base! Native to Asia, multiflora rose quickly escaped cultivation and spread rapidly, earning classification as a noxious weed in many states. It is banned for sale in Massachusetts as of January 1, 2009.

Identification

Multiflora rose can be identified by the thorns, long arching red/green branches or "canes" that become woody when mature, and a tangled/engulfing growth habit. It also has compound leaves with 5-7 small green leaflets that are are shed in fall.
Multiflora rose has fringed hairlike growths at the base of its leaf stalks, a feature not found on other similar rose species.

Multiflora rose in bloom

It bears clusters of small, white (occasionally pink) sweet-smelling flowers from May through June. The reddish fruit are ~¼ inch wide, round or oval, and persist in clusters on the plant from late summer through winter.

A possible lookalike is the native black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*), which has silvery blue/red canes and lower growth habit. The two species are most easily differentiated in summer, when black raspberry produces sweet edible black berries. Black raspberry also has fewer leaflets (3-5), and the thorns tend to be smaller and less painful.

Multiflora rose hips