



Garlic Mustard Takeover

FRIENDS OF THE WOODS

May 14, 2021 edition



Invasive Species

The purpose of this newsletter is to raise awareness of invasive species and the harm they can do to an environment, including making it very difficult for native plants to flourish. The “Friends of the Woods” volunteer group has been removing invasive plant species such as garlic mustard, multiflora rose, poison hemlock and barberry throughout the Knox County Parks. They also have begun to make improvements to the Honey Run Waterfall area by implementing a restoration area within the park, and hope to inaugurate similar projects in other parks.

Removing Invasive Garlic Mustard Improves Woodlands

By: Sue Hagan

Last spring, the Friends of the Woods volunteer group saved from possible obliteration a colony of delicate Virginia bluebells at Zuck Riparian Preserve, which is part of the Knox County Park District. The spring flowers were not saved from a mower, or from being picked, but rather from an invasive plant called garlic mustard.

The Zuck Riparian Preserve along the Kokosing River is located near Walhonding Road east of Millwood, and provides river access for canoes and kayaks. And it is habitat for numerous species of plants and animals, including the bluebells just mentioned. Virginia bluebells are a strikingly beautiful spring ephemeral, and can spread into large colonies if the conditions are right. They are dependent on long-tongued bees, especially bumblebees, for pollination, and, in turn, provide nectar for butterflies, moths and — sometimes — ruby-throated hummingbirds.

At Zuck, the bluebells were threatened by the garlic mustard. Like other invasive plants, garlic mustard crowds out more desirable species, and it does that in a couple of ways. First, this plant produces white flowers and thousands of seeds in its second year. When these seeds plant themselves, suddenly there are thousands more plants. Second — and this is quite interesting — research shows that garlic mustard actually changes the chemistry of the soil it lives



Volunteers Remove Garlic Mustard at Wolf Run Park

in, making it unsuitable for other plants. What a way to ensure the survival of a species!

Garlic mustard is everywhere in Knox County: in the parks and other natural woodland areas, along roadways, and popping up in flower gardens. The good thing about this plant is that it does not spread underground and it is quite easily pulled out by the roots.

However, removing it from an area does not ensure it won't come back, especially because smaller first-year plants might have gone unnoticed. Both the individual plants and the patches should be smaller in subsequent years, making it easier to keep an area clear, but it's also important to bag and remove pulled plants, so the flower heads don't settle into the soil and drop their seeds.

Garlic mustard removal is continuing this year, with pulls taking place at Wolf Run Regional Park, particularly in the Knox Woods State Nature Preserve located within the park boundaries. Regular hikers in this park have noted the “cleaner” look of the woodlands, and the profusion of spring wildflowers this year. And as more and more of this invasive plant is removed, our native trilliums, mayapples, hepatica and others will continue to reassert themselves and contribute to the health of the beautiful forest floor.

Note: Because of continuing COVID-19 restrictions, the Knox County Park District is not organizing large-scale groups to remove invasive plant species. However, those who wish to help can contact parks director Lori Totman, loritotman@co.knox.oh.us, and she can connect them to the Friends of the Woods volunteer group.



Virginia Bluebells at Zuck Riparian Preserve