

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of **invasive species**.

Activity 12: Invasive Species

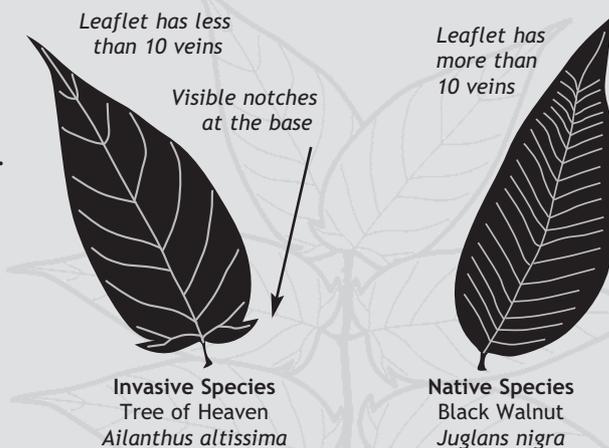
Moving plant and animal species to new environments can be beneficial, but can often cause environmental and economic harm.

Doing the Activity

The next time you are outdoors, introduce the term **invasive species** to children and discuss its meaning by asking:

- How would this area look different if a family of elephants lived here?
- What impact would the elephants have on the plants and animals nearby?
- Where do elephants live in the wild? Why don't elephants live here?

Of course, elephants have not invaded Ohio woodlands, but invasive species are impacting Ohio's forest ecosystems. For example, **Tree of Heaven** (or *Ailanthus*) is an invasive plant. It is often mistaken for the native **Black Walnut** and left to grow and reproduce. Tree of Heaven grows rapidly, is difficult to remove, and displaces native plants. Both species have **compound leaves**, but can you identify the differences between the leaflets?



Fill in the vowels to identify common characteristics of invasive species.

1. Have a short l_f_cycl_ and produce many _ffspr_ng
2. Gr_w very quickly
3. Are not affected by natural pr_d_t_rs in their new h_b_t_ts
4. Spr__d quickly and easily to new _c_syst_ms
5. Often t_l_r_t_ a wide range of different _nv_r_nm_nts

Adapted from Activity 12: Invasive Species from Project Learning Tree's *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!

- Attend, host, or sponsor a local PLT workshop to receive activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- Contact your PLT-Ohio State Coordinator: Sue Wintering, plt@dnr.state.oh.us, 614-265-6657



Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation. In Ohio, PLT is sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry and Project Learning Tree - Ohio.

Invasive Species found in Ohio Woodlands

Plants

Tree of Heaven, Bush Honeysuckle, Multiflora Rose, Garlic Mustard, Autumn Olive, Glossy Buckthorn

Animals

Emerald Ash Borer, Gypsy Moth, Feral Swine

For more information on Ohio invasive species, visit ohiodnr.com/forestry