

Youth Volunteer Program Guide

Cultivating a Community of Forest Stewards
through Invasive Plant Workdays



2022



Produced as a collaboration between
VT Dept. Forests, Parks & Recreation
and Winooski Valley Park District



Acknowledgements

This guide was inspired by those who came before us, those who do this work now, and those who will continue to steward the forests of Vermont.

VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation

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This guide is written to be viewed on electronic devices. If printed, important information like links to external websites or citations may be missed.

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About this guide

In 2013, when we began the work that would become the VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation Invasive Plant program, our initial thought was to hire trail crews to treat invasive plant infestations at parks throughout the state. With so much land to protect in Vermont State Forests and State Parks, and limited resources to do the work, it became clear that we'd need many hands involved. To enact largescale change, we'd need to not only engage landowners and community champions, but also future land stewards – the young people of Vermont.

So we developed relationships with companies, organizations, learning programs, individuals, and locations, like the relationship we have with Winooski Valley Park District. Through those relationships we're able to effect profound change in many places. Many public spaces have been revitalized and thus given second chances to be places that support both human recreation and thriving habitat for plants and wildlife. At Lake Bomoseen State Park, for example, students and staff from Castleton Village School pulled invasive plants with FPR staff, and planted locally evolved dogwoods. This continued for 6 years, and students were able to see the change over time and would revisit their worksites on successive trips with their families and friends.

In our experience, a volunteer program that focuses on restoration through invasive plant removal is valuable to young people for a number of reasons. It gets them up and out of their desks, using their bodies and their brains, and actively improving their environment. It's hopeful and it's fun. It gives participants an opportunity to learn about the environment and gives them some concrete restoration actions, as it is more important than ever to protect and support local biodiversity as our global climate changes and habitats shift.

The fun and success of running restoration programs focused on invasive plant removal led us to creating this guide as a resource for anyone interested. Here, you'll find steps and checklists to get you from first thinking of a program all the way to saying goodbye to your work group, and everything in between. The appendix is full of example schedules and scripts that we have used and you're welcome to use as-is or modify to meet your needs. The guide is written from our experiences as an outside organization working with groups that support young people, but **everything here can be adapted to any kind of group, of any age.**

Our work largely involved middle school-aged volunteers, and we include guidance for running a program as well as ideas for adapting your program to fit your needs.

Finally, this is a living document. As you use this guide, please share your thoughts or additions with us, and we will incorporate them in these pages and appendices. We wish you the best of luck, and thank you for getting even more people outdoors to learn, get involved, and make a difference.

~ Elizabeth Spinney & Lina Swislocki, VT Dept. Forests, Parks & Recreation



Steps, From Start to Finish

When planning to hold a workday or volunteer program focused on invasive plant removal, there are many things to consider. Make sure you know **WHO** you are working with, **WHAT** they are going to do, **WHY** they are doing it, **WHERE** you'll be working, and **WHEN** it will happen. Here are detailed considerations to make, broken down by [3-6 months before](#) a program, [2-3 months before](#), [1-2 months before](#), [day of a program](#), and [follow up](#) to a program. These can serve almost as checklists, and the '[Guidance on Running a Program](#)' section offers general guidance.

PRIOR TO THE PROGRAM

3-6 months before

1. Consider your goal for running the program

- Is your goal to provide an educational experience, to provide an experience purely about invasive plant removal, or a combination of the two? Maybe your goal is just to get a group started on an ongoing service project.
- Outlining a concrete goal/motivation prior to planning a program will help to determine the rest of the program details such as what group(s) to reach out to, where to host the work, etc.

2. Consider available resources

- What **resources** do you have access to, either from within your organization or community or from other organizations/communities? Remember that "resources" can be defined broadly—including participants, tools, support people, and facilities.
 - What **participants** do you want to work with?
 - Is there a local school or group you have a connection with?
 - What **tools** are needed? Where can you find them?
 - Tools like weed wrenches, loppers, gloves, buckets and/or trash bags may be useful for invasive plant removal.

- Shovels break easily under leverage, so do not work well for removal; however they are useful for restoration plantings.
- **How many** of each tool do you have access to?
 - Your local Conservation Commission may have tools to loan out or may know where to find tools to borrow.
 - The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation's Invasive Plant Program has a tool loan library in Essex. Contact **anr.fprInvasivePlants@vermont.gov** for more information.
- If you will be running invasive plant removal programs frequently, consider checking the following websites to buy your own weed wrench-like tools:
 - www.theuprooter.com**
 - www.pullerbear.com/index.html**
 - www.extractigator.com**
- What **support people** will be available to help with the program?
 - How many young people will be there? If working with a larger group, subgroups of 10-12 young people work well.
 - How many adults will you need? **At least** two adults for every subgroup of young people is a good ratio.
 - If needed, who can you reach out to for extra help? Other organizations? Community members? Knowledgeable participant leaders who may not need an "expert" to lead a group?
- What **facilities** will be available for program participants to use?
 - Access to water, bathrooms, shade, and a gathering space are helpful, but not always necessary.
 - Which facilities are available will influence what kind of group you can work with. For example, 100 participants taking part in a full day program with no bathrooms would be a rough experience, but a smaller group of participants taking part in a half day program would probably be just fine at the same site.

Steps, cont.

3. Consider where you'll be working

- What kind of **worksite** and **invasive plant removal project** are available for the program?
 - Will you be working on land owned by your organization, or a school? Will you be on private land, or town land, or at a state park or state forest?
 - Keep in mind that there may be different [insurance/liability considerations](#) at each of these types of sites.
 - Are there enough invasive plants at your proposed worksite to keep a group busy? How big a group can be kept busy, and for how long? What age is the proposed work most appropriate for?
 - There are several considerations to make when [picking a good worksite for you group](#).
- Do you have somewhere to [dispose of the invasive plants](#)?
- Will you incorporate restoration planting or will the focus be solely on invasive plant removal?

2-3 months before

1. Contact potential groups

- Have a pitch to sell your program.
 - Consider mentioning that it is a service-learning and team building opportunity, a chance to learn while outdoors, etc.
 - Make sure your pitch is true to you!
- Be flexible.
 - Consider offering full or half day programs.
 - With invasive plant removal projects, two hours is really a minimum length of time needed to provide a rewarding experience.
 - Consider a few different worksite locations, and ways the program could take place.
 - Ex: an in-class talk followed by a field excursion, or a program hosted entirely at a local park, etc.
- It is helpful to have a single contact for the potential group you'll work with, who disseminates information (like schedules and waivers) to participants for you.

2. Communicate with property managers

- If you do not own the land you'll be working on, make sure you have permission to remove invasive plants from the site.
- Learn what facilities are available and reserve them as necessary. Request special accommodations your group might need.
- Make an invasive plant disposal plan with property managers -- where should the invasive plants be left? Who will dispose of them?

3. Pick a worksite

- Visit the site before the program to choose where each group will work.
- Each group of 10-12 young people should have their own work area.

Steps, cont.

- A good worksite often includes:
 - ***A concentrated invasive plant population.*** Working in an area with a dense invasive plant infestation makes it simpler to keep the group together, easier for participants to learn ID, and reduces the chances of participants pulling non-target species.
 - ***An array of different sized invasive plants.*** Invasive plants that are easy to pull by hand and ones that need the use of tools to remove.
 - ***Limited safety hazards.*** Pick sites that lack poison ivy, stinging plants such as nettles, prickles/brambles, steep banks, barbed wire, etc.
- Make sure the project is age appropriate.
 - Younger people, like middle schoolers, will typically only stay engaged pulling herbaceous species such as garlic mustard for a about 30 minutes at a time.
 - Using tools such as weed wrenches to pull up woody invasive plants, such as honeysuckle and buckthorn, tends to keep participants of all ages engaged.
 - Saws are not appropriate for middle schoolers.
 - Thorny invasive plants, such as barberry, and toxic invasive plants, such as wild parsnip, should not be the main focus of any volunteer program with young people.

4. Make a plan for how you'll dispose of invasive plants

- Check with land managers for any specific disposal instructions.
- General disposal options include: hanging uprooted invasive plants, piling uprooted invasive plants, moving uprooted invasive plants off site, and bagging herbaceous invasive plants.
- More [information on disposal can be found here](#), with VT Department of Environmental Conservation's Waste Management and Prevention Division.

1-2 months before

1. Continue communicating with your volunteer group

- Confirm/finalize program date, time, and location.
- Find out what program forms you'll need, and send them to the group one month to two weeks ahead of the program date.
 - Different organizations have different liability release requirements. Check with your insurance company, and the groups you're working with, to see what [release forms you might need](#). You may need to have participants or their legal guardians sign a liability release form. If the program is outdoors, consider adding a tick notice. If you want to document and promote your efforts with photographs, consider adding a media release.
 - Depending on your needs/preferences, request that the group contact/leader return the completed forms back to you by a specific deadline, or bring them to you on the day of the program.
- Request that group leaders split participants into subgroups before the program, and that they provide at least one adult/chaperone per subgroup.
 - Remember, subgroups of 10-12 young people with one invasive plant "expert" from your organization, and at least one other adult/chaperone from the volunteer group works best.
 - Having the group leaders choose subgroups helps with group dynamics.
 - If using media release forms, ask that participants who have not signed the forms be put in the same subgroup.
- Seek input from group leaders while creating the schedule.
 - Do they want any specific topics/themes covered?
 - What time do the participants normally have lunch and/or snack?
 - What time do they need to leave? Allow for commute and transition times as you determine the timing of your program.
 - Send your schedule to group leaders ahead of time for any feedback.

Steps, cont.

- Make sure group leaders know what facilities are (or are not) available, so participants can come prepared.
- About one week before the scheduled program, remind group leaders to remind participants to bring any necessary program forms (signed) and to come prepared.
- Send out a [list of gear participants should bring to the program](#).

2. Secure invasive plant “experts” to help out with the program

- Each group should have a representative from, or volunteering for, your organization. They will be the invasive plant “expert”.
- Invasive plant “experts” help identify the invasive plants, and teach about the invasive plants’ impacts on the ecosystem.
 - Remember, for each subgroup, having one invasive plant “expert” in addition to at least one adult/chaperone, per 10-12 young people, works well.
 - **chaperones** should be responsible for managing group dynamics.
 - **Invasive plant “experts”** should be prepared to teach about invasive plants, habitat restoration, and how to use tools, etc.
- Communicate the following details with invasive plant “experts” before the program.
 - Schedule for the day, including:
 - Tasks
 - Timeline
 - Activities
 - What tasks they will be doing and/or leading during the program.
 - What invasive plants and tools they will be working with.

3. Plan flow of the day

- Finalize the schedule for the day.
- Plan any activities.

-
- For larger groups, organize materials for each group leader.
 - Order restoration plantings if incorporating a restoration component into the program.

4. Gather Supplies

- Here are examples of supplies that might be useful to have for a program that has an educational component.
 - Teaching & activity materials
 - [Prepare packets* \(if using\) for invasive plant “experts”.](#)
 - Info sheet: emergency procedures (including location to share with 911), leader’s cell phone #s, list of participants in group
 - Tool inventory
 - Map of site
 - Schedule
 - Description of roles to assign participants
 - Score card
 - Instructions for afternoon activity
 - Prizes and certificates (if using)
 - Tools
 - If borrowing tools, arrange pick up/drop off times

**these can be reused*

Steps, cont.

DAY OF THE PROGRAM

1. If necessary, check in with property manager

- Say hello and let them know you've arrived.
- Confirm how many people and vehicles are coming.
- Double check your removal plan with them.

2. Use flagging to mark various sites, including:

- Boundaries for each subgroup's work area.
- Any specific disposal site.
- Any areas which participants should avoid.
 - Mark any hazards such as poison ivy, brambles, stinging plants, barbed wire, etc. that are present but can be worked around.
 - If those hazards are present but cannot be worked around, choose a different worksite.
- This can **also** be done the day before the program.

3. Create a central meeting area where participants will receive instructions,

OR

Where participants can focus and learn (If adding an educational component)

- Find a spot that is out of the rain or hot sun, with minimal distractions.
- Display the schedule for the day so participants know what to expect.
- Set out name tags and markers on picnic tables for participants to fill out.
- Set up a teaching area with your supplies, an easel and/or white board, and anything else you might need.
- Arrange picnic tables in a semi-circle facing the teaching area.

4. Unload tools

- Organize tools, including bug spray, by subgroup.
 - Have a tool inventory sheet for each subgroup as well as a master tool inventory to help keep track of everything that's getting lent out.
- Provide each subgroup with a bag or crate to hold gloves, bug spray, and any other small tools.
 - For younger people and/or bigger groups, bring tools to worksites before the participants arrive.

5. If bathrooms and trash cans/recycling are available, determine their locations

6. Check in with invasive plant "experts"

- This is especially important for larger groups, or if your "experts" don't normally help with educational programs.
- Make sure they:
 - Know where their worksite is.
 - Bring their subgroup's tools to their worksite.
 - Are comfortable with the schedule for the day and any activities they will be leading.
 - Are comfortable with ID and tool use.
 - Are ready to teach their subgroup invasive plant ID.
 - Know what to do with the invasive plants they've pulled.

7. Greet participants as they arrive

- Direct everyone to their tables or meet-up spots.
- Collect forms (make sure the adults filled them out too!).
- Point out the bathrooms and trash cans/recycling.

Steps, cont.

- Check in with group leaders who are in charge of youth volunteers.
 - Provide them with copies of the schedule, making sure they know when snack, lunch, and departure times are expected to occur.

8. Run program!

- See "[Guidance on Running a Program](#)" section.

9. Clean up

- Before the participants leave, make sure subgroups properly dispose of their invasive plants.
- Account for and pack up all tools -- the invasive plant "experts" can help you carry them to your vehicle(s) or storage area.
- Collect and deposit any remaining trash in the correct place.

10. Debrief with invasive plant "experts"

- What went well? What could be improved?
- Did they run into any issues?
- Any other thoughts, ideas, suggestions, or comments they'd like to share?
- Follow up with anyone who has to leave before the debrief so you can get their insights too.

FOLLOW UP

1. Send thank you e-mails or notes

- Send thank you notes to participating organizations, and any staff or volunteers you brought in to help.

2. Ask the participating organization to complete a program evaluation

- Remind them that feedback is important for improving your program.
- Survey Monkey or other free online survey resources are an easy way to get feedback.
- A survey request or link can be included in the thank you email.

3. If working with an educational organization, send “back in the classroom” activities

- [Youth Volunteer Program Guide](#)
Companion website for this guide, has linkable subsections for sharing.
- [Invasive Plant Lesson Plans and Activities](#)
Companion lesson plans and activities for this guide.
- These can even be included in the thank you email.

4. Write yourself a program reflection

- What went well? What could have been better? Are there any improvements you can think of or things you'd try differently next time? Any circumstances specific to this group to remember for a future program?
- Program reflections are very helpful to plan future programs with a group, and can also be very useful for grant writing and reporting.

Guidance on Running a Program

It is easy to get lost in the details. Hopefully, the [step by step checklists](#) provide structure to that process. Here is general guidance that our staff have learned from experience, and we hope can prove useful as you navigate setting up a successful program.

HAVE A CLEAR, HOPEFUL MESSAGE

- The first step towards creating a conservation mindset is developing an appreciation of nature and the outdoors. Help participants develop that appreciation by giving them a positive outdoor experience!
- The issue of invasive plants can quickly become overwhelming and daunting. Sharing a hopeful message will help participants feel that they have made a real difference and that they are empowered to do more.
- Help participants recognize the impact they are making by reminding them to take a look around after they're done working – can they see a difference? Make sure to emphasize what a big, positive change they made by removing invasive plants. Consider taking before and after pictures.
- Encourage participants to help “spread the word, not the plant” by telling other people about what they learned at your program.

SET PARTICIPANTS UP FOR SUCCESS

- Work in small subgroups.
 - 10 – 12 young people per subgroup ensures each person gets individual attention from their subgroup leaders.
 - Each group should have a representative from or volunteering for your organization (the invasive plant “expert”) and a representative from the school (the chaperone) as their group leaders.
- Create a [comfortable learning environment](#).
 - People are able to learn better when they are comfortable and their basic needs are met. Make sure to provide access to water and food

(snack/lunch breaks), and, when possible, restrooms and a place to gather out of the elements.

- Make it personal! Have everyone wear a name tag so participants can be addressed by name. Come up with a fun subgroup name to encourage team building and group spirit.
- Create a safe work environment (see safety tips in “Facilitating a successful invasive plant removal session” below).
- Have a good flow: mix up activities, take breaks, don’t do any one thing for too long.
 - Keep materials and activities engaging and age appropriate.
 - Teach to the level of your audience.
 - Minimize the amount of time you spend talking. Keep your lesson engaging by asking questions, demonstrating with visual aids/ props, and using relatable examples and analogies.

FACILITATING A SUCCESSFUL INVASIVE PLANT WORKDAY

- Fostering relationships with partner organizations allows them to build invasive plant events into their workflow, which also helps ensure there’s always enough leaders because people will want to take part.
- Having a [good worksite](#) with invasive plants of various sizes will help keep young people engaged.
- [Teach plant identification](#).
 - Teach ID in small subgroups.
 - Participants optimally can learn 2-3 species at a time.
 - One way to teach ID is to show participants plant samples and guide them into noticing important ID characteristics.

Guidance, cont.



Carrying a weed wrench like this minimizes the risk of hitting people with the tool.



Carrying loppers like this reduces risk of poking or cutting something accidentally.

- Stress the importance of pulling up the right plant. You don't want them to accidentally pull the species that they're trying to protect.
- Encourage participants to ask as many ID questions as they need to. Reassure them that they are not expected to be "experts" yet, and the best way to learn is to ask questions.
- If the invasive plants you're working with have flowers or berries, remind participants that not all individual plants will have those features so it's still important to learn the other, less obvious, ID characteristics.
- Have participants find an example of each invasive plant species you'll be working with before they begin pulling.
- Invasive plant "experts" should pay attention to what participants pull to make sure they have their ID down. If a participant makes a mistake, help them see the difference between what they pulled and the target invasive plants.
- Teach tool use & safety.
 - Do not hand out the tools until participants can successfully ID target invasive plants.
 - Go over how to safely use and transport tools before passing them out to participants.
 - Remember, loppers are sharp, wrenches are heavy and awkward to carry, and the jaws of wrenches can result in injury. See images to the left for how to properly carry tools.

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- Demonstrate the proper use of each tool and/or removal technique that will be relevant for the work period.
 - Emphasize the importance of removing all roots so the invasive plant doesn't grow back.
 - If using loppers, remind participants that loppers are for cutting low branches to make it easier to use other tools like the weed wrench. They aren't for cutting the invasive plant down to the ground, and that they will still need to remove the roots.
 - Before heading to the worksites, remind participants to keep track of their tools and gloves. Pick a designated, easy-to-recognize spot (on the trail, next to a big tree) to put down tools when they're not being used so they are easy to find and share.
 - Demonstrate disposal techniques and teach participants why they're using that method (e.g. hanging a woody shrub upside down ensures the roots dry out and die and allows it to decompose in the same area it was removed, thus returning the nutrients to the soil).
 - Keep participants engaged.
 - Work periods should be no longer than 2 hours. 1.5 hours seems to be ideal. For longer days, split the work into two periods separated by lunch.
 - [Assign a position/job to each participant](#) to help them focus. Participants can rotate through jobs throughout the work period.
 - Remind participants that they will need to work together to get the bigger/tougher invasive plants out of the ground, and that teamwork and communication are important.

Guidance, cont.

- Provide at least 1 break where everyone stops working and has some water/snack. Playing a quick game during this time can be a good way to refocus the subgroup if needed.
- Picking an appropriate worksite and working with appropriate invasive plants will go a long way to keep participants engaged.
- Consider incorporating a [tally of invasive plants pulled](#) as a motivator for participants.
 - For participants about 11 years and younger, have each group track how many invasive plants they are pulling. At the end of the day, add the subgroups' totals together to see how many invasive plants the larger group has pulled as a whole.
 - For participants about 12 years and older, a friendly competition between subgroups can be a great motivator! Have each group tally how many invasive plants they remove by wrench and by hand. At the end of the day, announce the subgroup that pulled the most invasive plants and have a prize for those participants.
 - Make sure participants understand that in order to count an invasive plant as removed, they must get all the roots.
- Keep participants safe.
 - Before allowing participants to use the tools, drive home the importance of safe tool use.
 - For large groups, go over tool safety twice, once all together and once in subgroups, to ensure all participants hear the important information.
 - Before beginning removal efforts make sure to:
 - Point out any hazards at the worksite, such as poison ivy, stinging nettles, or barbed wire.

- Clearly define the boundaries of the worksite and emphasize the importance of staying together as a subgroup.
- Cover general safety topics including ticks, poison ivy, staying hydrated, etc.
- During the work period, chaperones and invasive plant “experts” are responsible for the safety of the younger participants.
- At the end of the day, remind everyone to do a tick check.

INVASIVE PLANT EDUCATION

- Major concepts to convey about invasive plants include:
 - They did not evolve in the places you’re finding them, but were brought there (usually by humans, either accidentally or for ornamental or cultural uses).
 - They lack predators, competitors, and diseases in their new environments and so are able to thrive.
 - They harm things we value, such as the environment, the economy, or human health.
 - Check out [Other Resources](#) and the [Appendices](#) for more ideas.
- Keep it engaging: Keeping an outdoor lesson engaging could be a treatise of its own. Here are some specific things we’ve found that work well to keep middle school-aged volunteers engaged in an invasive plant program:
 - Before the program, talk with group leaders about what participants are learning so you can relate your lesson to their other experiences.
 - When discussing tool safety, ask subgroup leaders to demonstrate what not to do before having young participants use tools.
 - Assign participants jobs and switch them throughout the day.
 - Work in short periods punctuated by snacks and/or activities.

Guidance, cont.

- Have samples of the invasive plants on hand while teaching ID so participants can see the features you're describing.
 - Consider doing leaf rubbings or drawings and labelling the pertinent characteristics.
- Try having an activity that takes place throughout the day and culminates at the end during the final discussions.
 - We've done this before by giving vocabulary words to each group. They discuss the word throughout the day and present the word to everyone else at the end of the program.
- Use score cards for teams to track invasive plants removed (useful for program engagement, for grant reporting, and for invasive plant management data).
- Save the educational component until after the 1st work period when possible.
 - Once participants have seen the work and invasive plants first hand, they will be more comfortable and therefore more likely to participate in discussions.
 - Also, working first will allow them to get out some of their energy before they are asked to engage on a potentially new – and certainly challenging – topic.
- Lessons usually last between 10 and 30 minutes, depending on the participants' engagement.
- Ask participants what they know about invasive plants. Have they ever noticed any of these plants before? If so, ask what kind of setting it was in (yard, planting, woods, etc.). Can they think of a connection between where they've seen these plants and how these plants tend to spread?

INCORPORATING SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- Educational activities and games can be a fun way to reinforce the concepts taught in the more formal educational portion of the program.
- Access our library of [invasive plant lesson plans and activities](#), found on VTinvasives.org.

INCORPORATING RESTORATION PLANTINGS

- Restoration plantings can be a fun, informative, and useful addition to an invasive plant workday or program, when time and resources allow.
- If you include restoration planting, consider also:
 - Teaching about why you're doing restoration work (to give locally-evolved species a head start to recolonize a site, to help erosion control, etc.).
 - Making a big deal about the planting since some young people have never planted anything.
 - Ideally, have at least one plant for every two young people.
 - Bringing a supply of locally evolved species to plant. You can take cuttings with participants if the timing is right, or buy starts if the budget allows.

Adapting a Program

ADAPTING YOUR PROGRAM TO VARIOUS GROUPS

Most of our work was done with middle school-aged volunteers, and we've adapted those lessons learned for a variety of groups. See the following considerations if you'd like to [work with a different age group](#).

- Elementary school.
 - Younger people are physically smaller, so the tools may be difficult to use. Stress teamwork for pulling big invasive plants and the value of pulling lots of little invasive plants.
 - Attention spans are shorter with this age group, so work periods should be, too. Plan for more activities to account for shorter work periods.
 - Skip the competition – younger people end up feeling bad about losing the competition rather than good about the fact that they helped the environment. Instead, focus on how much they can achieve as a group and as a class.
 - Skip the skits – this age group often have a hard time coming up with their own ideas for presentations.
- High school.
 - Having a shorter day focused solely on invasive plant removal and/or restoration plantings rather than a longer day that also incorporates activities often works best.
 - With technical schools or classrooms where the teacher has an interest, you can go over management plans or do a mapping activity, just check with the teachers beforehand about their interest and ability.
- Adults.
 - Adult programs and middle school programs can have a very similar theme and message.
 - Can have multiple work periods instead of activities.

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- Can use saws, work with or near thorny or toxic invasive plants (although we recommend not exclusively thorny or toxic invasive plants—and always stress precautions), can focus on prolific herbaceous species like garlic mustard for a bit longer.
 - Large groups (40 – 100 participants).
 - Have someone whose sole role is to facilitate the day — answering questions, keeping track of time, etc.
 - Maintain clear and consistent communication both with group leaders and subgroup leaders (chaperones and invasive plant “experts”).
 - Make things as simple as possible for subgroup leaders.
 - Use *predetermined* schedules, subgroups, roles, and activities to keep things organized.
 - Allow for more transition time between activities in the schedule.
 - Keep education periods short and try to do more in subgroups because it can be challenging to keep all those people focused in an outdoor setting.
 - Bathroom and water facilities become a lot more important, if not required.
 - FOR ALL GROUPS—Keep time in mind, and be ready to adapt.
 - Communicate clearly about schedule needs – travel time, mandatory snack or lunch breaks, etc.
 - When working with schools, find out when they need to be back at school, then reverse engineer the time your program must end.
 - When working with schools, there is always the option to do the education portion in the classroom, then a field excursion — this can be particularly useful if the weather is questionable or if you only have a half day outdoors.

Adapting a Program

- Half vs. full day.
 - Pros and cons to both – being clear about the goals of your program will help you choose how long the day should be.
 - 2 hours is the shortest a program can be and still cover everything necessary.

MAKE THE PROGRAM YOUR OWN

- Enthusiasm is contagious! If you are excited about something it will show. Incorporate topics and examples you find interesting.
- The contents of this guide are meant to be helpful suggestions. The program is flexible and adaptable – every person and situation is different and everyone has their own teaching style. Modify it to something that works for you!
- Have fun!

Helpful Hints

When first starting to run invasive plant workdays or programs, consider working with smaller groups (like one class rather than a whole school). As you get more experienced, you can consider scaling up.

Communicate expectations for group leaders, participants, and your invasive plant “experts”, including that they must be there through the whole workday or program.

For larger groups:

- **The chaperones** play a key role in supporting subgroups, as an extra set of eyes to ensure everyone is staying together and working safely, and are responsible for any corrective measures.
 - When working with schools:
 - School aides should **not** be counted as chaperones, as their focus is generally on only one or a few of the participants.
 - It is helpful to have a roving teacher/chaperone who stays near the central meeting area to manage the first aid and supervise participants as they get water or snacks.
- It can be challenging to find invasive plant “experts” who are comfortable with both restoration work AND youth volunteer management.
 - Try having the chaperones (rather than the invasive plant “experts”) lead the activities — this can alleviate some stress on the invasive plant “experts” and can also help keep chaperones engaged in the whole activity which adds to the participants’ experience.

Other Resources

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON INVASIVE PLANTS

VTinvasives.org

- [Youth Volunteer Program Guide](#)
Companion website for this guide, has linkable subsections for sharing.
- [Invasive Plant Lesson Plans and Activities](#)
Companion lesson plans and activities for this guide.
- [Invasive Plants FAQ](#)
Learn background information about invasive plants.
- [Invasive Plant Factsheets](#)
Available by species for most, helpful for identification and quick facts.
- [Management Best Practices](#)
How to get started, and resources for treatment and restoration work .

[‘Teaching about Invasive Species’](#)

A Green Teacher publication that provided inspiration when we started this work.

[National Association for Interpretation](#)

Trained and provided framework for how our staff design and lead programs.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

We have fostered relationships with organizations in the Rutland and Burlington areas to support our programs. Consider these organizations (and others!) when developing your local network.

- Town Conservation Commission
- Universities or Colleges
- Local Nature Centers
- Rotary Clubs
- Trail Stewards
- Master Naturalists / Master Gardeners

Appendices

Appendix A: Example Checklists

- Example Prior-to-Program Checklist
- Example Day-of-Program Checklist
- Example Program Materials & Tools Checklist

Appendix B: Example Schedules

- Middle School, Full Day, 100+ Students
- Middle School, Full Day, 15-30 Students
- Middle School, Half Day, 30+ Students
- Technical High School Forestry Class, Full Day, 15+ Students
- Elementary School, Half Day, 15–30 Students
- Adult group, Half Day, 15+ Participants

Appendix C: Example Forms and Example Certificate of Appreciation

- Example Tick Notice and Gear List
- Example Half-sheet Handout for Guardians
- Example Certificates of Appreciation (generic, personalized)

Appendix D: Example Leader Packet and Example Volunteer Packet

- For Leaders:
 - Example Informational Sheet for Subgroup Leaders
 - Invasive Plants, Their Removal, and Their Disposal: A Cheat Sheet
 - Example Teaching Script for Large Groups
- For Volunteers:
 - Tool Inventory and Team Positions
 - Score Cards- with Points (recommended for ages 12+) & without Points (recommended for younger volunteers)

Appendix E: Supporting Materials for Classroom Learning

- Back in the Classroom

You Can Make A Difference!

VTinvasives.org



For questions about this guide
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