

Hopewell Valley

NEIGHBORS

August 2018

Spotlight on Community

Force of Nature

Japanese Barberry

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Photograph by Benoit Cortet

Each month we have honored a “Force of Nature” recipient who has made a positive impact on the Hopewell Valley community. This month we are straying from our standard format in order to bring you a special report regarding the dangers of an invasive plant all too common in Valley landscape.

Japanese Barberry is a known or recognizable plant to many Valley residents. Most people know that deer can carry ticks infected with Lyme disease that can then be transmitted to human hosts. However, it is less well known that Japanese Barberry is a habitat for those same ticks. The increased humidity and shelter under the Barberry makes a perfect home for ticks and mice or other small rodents that are Lyme carriers. Tick populations are five times higher in areas with Japanese Barberry than in those without it and the number of those ticks infected with Lyme is a rather startling 12 times higher.

Ironically, Japanese Barberry is readily sold and has actually been advertised as a good residential yard plant because it is unappealing to deer. This makes it appear on the surface as a good way to limit the tick population, by taking away the incentive for one of their larger carriers to visit home gardens. Unfortunately, the ticks themselves and some of their smaller carriers are attracted to Barberry. Barberry has been deemed risky enough to be limited or in some cases entirely banned by six states around the country.

Not only is Barberry potentially very detrimental to Valley residents’ health, but it is also one of the more prevalent

and successful invasive species in our area. Invasive species generally are good at outcompeting native, local species and so end up controlling more area than other species combined. The lack of native species can create a problem for native animals looking for habitat, food, and other resources from their environment. Invasive species also reduce biodiversity, making the ecosystem more vulnerable and less versatile.

We at Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space ask our neighbors for your help to create better outreach and share useful knowledge about invasive species action. The Hopewell Valley community has a long history that proves that our combined strength of concerned, informed citizens and passionate local organizations is a force to be reckoned with. Let’s band together to limit the use and proliferation of Japanese Barberry by home gardeners and in landscape design. This will take education and dedication from community members as well as cooperation between local environmental organizations and garden centers to create an informed community that has safer and healthier practices. We hope that the spread of knowledge will foster a more inquisitive and caring environmental spirit in this already warm community.



For more information and to watch a video featuring FoHVOS Stewardship Director Dr. Michael Van Clef check out, “How One Plant May Be Fueling the Spread of Lyme.” Investigations-Team: The Lyme Wars. NBC 4, New York. 27 Oct., 2017.