Invasive Plant Alert[1]

Italian arum

Arum italicum Mill.

Also known as Orange Candleflower, Cuckoo's Pint, and Italian Lords-and-Ladies is a growing threat in the East. It has already been identified as invasive in Alexandria, Virginia, Rock Creek Park, and the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., in addition to other areas of the country. Able to survive the cold of winter in many climates, Italian arum is known to be an especially problematic invasive species in warmer areas. It propagates via bird and animal dispersed seeds and hardy underground corms.

Figure 1 Leaves. Photo Courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden

Where to Look

Italian arum is a species native to Europe that is planted in woodland gardens and shaded border areas. Being a woodland species, Italian arum prefers moist, well-shaded woodland environments. Woodlands near residential areas should be monitored, as should shaded areas near buildings, since the plant may spread from residential gardens into these areas. There have also been reports of the plant being spread by dumping yard debris, or contaminating mulch and compost. This species has been found in Rock Creek Park.

Identifying the Plant

Italian arum is a stemless woodland species which typically only grows to heights of 12"-18" tall. The distinctive white-veined leaves are present in the fall and can persist through the winter in warm winter climates. In cooler climates the leaves die in the winter and reemerge in the spring. The plant produces flowers with a pale hood-like spathe covering a white-yellow spadix in late May that give off a displeasing odor. In all climates the foliage dies in the summer before the plant fruits. The berries grow in tight clusters and change color from light green to orange-red as they mature from late summer to early fall.

Figure 2 Flower. Photo Courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden

Care should be taken when handling the plant, as all parts are poisonous and irritating to the skin.

How to get rid of it?

Italian arum is notoriously difficult to eradicate once established. There is no broadly accepted method of control or treatment. Soil removal threatens to break up the corms, only facilitating further propagation of the plant in the disturbed soil. Herbicides reportedly only provide temporary relief from the plant's spread, and burning eradicates foliage alone. The plant's thick cuticle should be considered when planning chemical control.

Figure 3 Fruits. Photo Courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden

Resources

Missouri Botanical Garden Factsheet:
http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/your-garden/plant-finder/plant-details/kc/y760/arum-italicum.aspx

GardenWeb Forum on Difficulty in Eradicating:
http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/load/natives/msg1109360820447.html

[1] This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region

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