

Help! The Nature Institute looking for Saturday volunteers to battle invasive species

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY – New stewardship director at The Nature Institute (TNI) is looking for ready and willing people to add to his pool of volunteers this summer.

Wright recently took the position of stewardship director and has been hard at work putting together various programs and efforts to improve the quality of TNI's many trails and overall wildlife – both flora and fauna. One of the most important efforts at TNI is the eradication of invasive species. Some more astute Riverbend residents and Riverbender.com readers know of some examples of these – Asian carp, bush honeysuckle and zebra mussels just to name a few – but, Oriental bittersweet is Wright's target for extermination this weekend.

Anyone wanting to help improve the overall quality of TNI's flora is invited to join Wright at TNI's main building at 9 a.m. Saturday until noon. As the new stewardship director, Wright said he would like to see what sort of community investment will occur with his call for volunteers.

Volunteers will be given some brief history on the Oriental bittersweet as well as some coaching in how to remove it, Wright said.

“Oriental bittersweet is from Asia, and a lot of people use it for ground cover, because it grows fast over whatever,” Wright said. “People have also used it a lot in wreath-making, because of its little yellow and red berries.”

Those little and red berries are not edible for humans, but birds love them. In fact, birds' cravings for the stuff may be a significant piece of why the species, which can grow as a climbing vine, ground matting and even a small shrub, is choking and clogging the old forests at TNI. After they eat the berries, seeds escape their cloacae and fall into soil conducive to the invasive vine's growth.

“Some people argue it's fine if it's just used in wreaths,” Wright said of the Oriental bittersweet. “But, the real hardcore conservationist would tell you birds could just as easily eat the berries off those wreaths and spread its seed all over.”

One of the main concerns Wright has over the continued spread of the Oriental bittersweet is it could grow to such magnitudes it could potentially choke and kill some of the 200-year-old oak trees growing at TNI.

Removal of the plant is simple, Wright said. Volunteers will be coached on how to reach for the base of the plants' root systems and pull until it is removed in its entirety – a task Wright said was relatively simple and easy. Those plants will be stacked and burnt by Wright after removal as a method of disposal.

TNI also has volunteers staffing both its educational and greenhouse programs. The latter of those will feature a native plant sale next Saturday, June 16, also from 9 a.m. - noon, Wright said.

More information can be found on the initiative's Facebook event, which can be found [here](#).