

# INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP ON INVASIVE SPECIES



MOHAWK SEEDKEEPER GARDENS

## Indigenous Food Trees Project

### About Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens

Located in Ohsweken, ON, on Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens are carrying on traditional Haudenosaunee stewardship practices to honour their spiritual responsibilities to all of creation while fostering healthy, sustainable lifestyles for future generations.

For over seven years, Owner and Operator, Terrylynn Brant, has created a large public space in which community members can reconnect with the land and Haudenosaunee culture through ceremony and knowledge sharing around traditional practices, such as gardening, heritage seed-saving, crafting, native plant foraging, and maple syrup making.

## Impacts of Invasive Species on Traditional Practices

Whether it be through their traditional agricultural or foraging practices, the Haudenosaunee people have always relied maintaining respectful relationships with native Carolinian plant species for their prosperity and wellbeing. The introduction of non-Carolinian species has impacted those relationships, as well as the traditional practices that underly them.

**Giant hogweed** (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), known locally as parsnip, has appeared and rapidly expanded over past the few years. In addition to causing skin irritations on land-users, the aggressively growing invasive plant is threatening Haudenosaunee gardeners' abilities to cultivate traditional varieties of agricultural plant species. While limited removal efforts are taking place, mixed land-use throughout the region has made broad coordination difficult and resulted in a never-ending battle for individual Haudenosaunee gardeners.

**Common buckthorn** (*Rhamnus cathartica*) was introduced to southern Ontario over a century ago and has since invaded Carolinian ecosystems. Today, it impacts both native plant species and the traditional Haudenosaunee foraging practices that surround them. Culturally important foraging species, including pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), hickory (*Carya ovata*), Kentucky coffee-tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) and thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*), have all been impacted by the invasive buckthorn.

## Community Efforts to Combat Invasive Species Impacts

Led by Terrylynn Brant and the Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens, the newly launched Indigenous Food Trees Project seeks to strengthen Haudenosaunee land management by introducing community members to traditional food sources and encouraging the revitalization of sustainable foraging practices.

Building on the Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens' existing land-based capacity building activities, the Indigenous Food Trees Project will become another outlet for inviting interested community members to develop their own knowledge and skills, while taking collective action through hands-on land management practices. This will include re-establishing native Carolinian food trees on Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens' lands and removing invasive species that may pose a threat to their growth and survival.


In doing so, the Indigenous Food Trees project will give Haudenosaunee foragers and native Carolinian species alike the best chance at a good life.





*“Plants that don’t treat people well.”*

Terrylynn Brant

### Learn more about the Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens

 [seedkeeper.ca](http://seedkeeper.ca)

 [www.facebook.com/groups/846377065399516](https://www.facebook.com/groups/846377065399516)

 [www.instagram.com/terrylynnbrant](https://www.instagram.com/terrylynnbrant)

*On behalf of the Canadian Council on Invasive Species (CCIS), Advocate Strategies engaged indigenous communities and organizations to construct a series of spotlights on Indigenous-led invasive species initiatives. The intention of these case studies is to inspire future projects and promote action-oriented collaborations that collectively address invasive species issues.*