



Invasive Plant Tag



<i>Objective</i>	A fun and active game designed to show participants how quickly populations of invasive plants can grow and the positive impact humans can have by managing invasive plants.
<i>Audience</i>	10 – 25 people; ages 8+
<i>Duration</i>	20 minutes
<i>Materials</i>	Items to mark the boundaries (e.g. backpacks, cones, etc.)
<i>Background</i>	One of the key characteristics of invasive plants is that they have the potential to spread very quickly. When invasive plants are brought to a new area, these plants leave behind the predators, diseases, and competitors that they had to contend with in their range of origin. Without these natural checks and balances, invasive plants can quickly dominate ecosystems. This activity demonstrates this concept, but also shows how human intervention in the form of managing invasive plants can make a big difference and keep the invasive plants in check.
<i>Procedure</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Set up boundaries, marking the 4 corners – this is the “forest” or “field” ecosystem. <p>Round One:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Line participants up on one side of the playing field between 2 corners – these participants are the locally evolved plants.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>What are some examples of locally evolved plants in Vermont?</i>3. Pick out 2 participants to come to the center. (Have these two participants answer the question “<i>How do invasive plants spread once they get to VT?</i>”). Tell them they are birds who just ate a bunch of invasive shrub honeysuckle berries and invasive buckthorn berries.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ask the group - <i>How do invasive plants spread?</i>4. Explain the instructions to all participants:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The locally evolved plants are trying to get to the other side of the playing field. If tagged by a bird they turn into an invasive plant. Invasive plants can’t move, but they can reach out and tag other participants as they run by. If tagged by an invasive plant, participants turn into an invasive plant. If a participant goes out of bounds, they turn into an invasive plant. Have other instructors or participants be referees to make sure all participants are playing fairly.5. Say GO to begin the game. Once all of the participants have reached the other side, say GO again to have them run back to the first side. Repeat until almost all the participants have been tagged and turned into invasive plants. The birds will never be able to turn everyone into invasive plants, so end the game when there are only a few participants left running.6. Debrief with the group after Round One. Ask questions like:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What happened? Why were the invasive plants able to outcompete the locally evolved plants? (<i>Aided by the birds at first, then became numerous and could tag more plants. This demonstrates how they spread, and then them lacking competitors, diseases, predators wherever they end up</i>).

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- How did the population of invasive plants expand? (*One invasive plant often leads to a clump of invasive plants as seen by getting tagged by an invasive plant. This demonstrates shading and outcompeting locally evolved plants, and how prolifically invasive plants reproduce*)
 - Invasive plant populations grow quickly (didn't take that long to dominate).

Round Two:

7. Line the participants up and pick two new participants to be birds, as in Round One.
8. Have the remaining participants put their thumbs up behind their backs. Go down the line and put a few thumbs down (*~5 thumbs per 20 participants*). These participants with thumbs down are now locally evolved plants being looked after by a steward. When they get tagged, they must stay in place for one round, but then they get to come back to the line. (They're slowed down by invasive plants, but not completely dominated).
9. Repeat the game as before. The birds will never be able to turn everyone into invasive plants, so end the game when there are only a few participants left running.
10. Debrief with the group after Round Two. Ask questions like:
 - What happened this time? (*Game takes longer and you can never tag everyone*)
 - Sometimes humans must intervene to protect what we value (*We value the locally evolved plants, so we steward them*).
 - The more people working to manage invasive plants, the more locally evolved plants we can protect!
 - If pairing this activity with a workday, you can share : "You were the steward today! We can and did make a difference today!"