

Learning About “Weeds,” “Invasive Species” or Plants That Have Lost Their Original Relationships



Activity Purpose

Some plants have lost their connection to the place they’re from leading them to be categorized as “weeds” or “invasive species.” This activity involves learning about those plants, their impact on their environment, and how we might think about them.



Activity Overview

- ◇ Go on a walk. As you walk, you may come across some plants that are considered “weeds” or “invasive.” These are plants that may not originally be from the area and tend to grow excessively, crowding out other plants.
 - ◇ Dandelions, buckthorn, garlic mustard, poison hemlock are common examples
- ◇ Pay attention to those plants and how they grow in that place. Are there a lot of them or a little? Do other plants grow with and around these plants? How do you think these plants interact with their surroundings (other plants, animals, the soil etc.)? How do these plants affect the health or balance of this place?
- ◇ Consider how these plants got here and why they are the way they are in this place. Many “invasive” plants migrated or were brought from another ecosystem where they were part of a balanced ecosystem. Is it the plants’ fault that they’re here or that the conditions in this place allow them to grow excessively?

Roles, Relations, Responsibilities & Gifts

- ◇ As you discuss these plants, try to frame them in terms of their relationships. Instead of using terms like “weed” or “invasive” you might call them plants that have lost their original relationships.
- ◇ Consider that many of these plants have gifts that humans forgot about, and some gifts that might not be useful for other plants and animals in this area. For example, garlic mustard was widely used as food by people in Europe, but when it was brought to Turtle Island humans forgot about it. Insects and other animals here don’t like to eat garlic mustard so it grows unchecked, disrupting the growth of Indigenous plants.
- ◇ What role does this plant play in this place? How might that differ from the role it plays in its homeland?
- ◇ Consider how these plants might disrupt the roles, relations, responsibilities and gifts of other plants. What are the rippling effects of this interference?

Learning Across Generations & with Other Families

- ◇ Take time to hear the ideas from everyone in your family. What do you learn from each other? What are the different perspectives the youngest children bring? And the oldest?
- ◇ Check in with friends and family who live far away. Do they have the same plants near them?

Supporting Learning & Wellbeing

- ◇ What can we learn about this plant on how (or how not) to adapt to new places and be a good neighbor?
- ◇ Are there specific places where you find this plant? Near water? Near other plants? Why is that?
- ◇ You might learn more about the plant relative by asking someone about it or researching it online.
- ◇ Use “how” and “why” questions to talk about plants. Consider what these plants were like a long time ago and what they will be like in the future.

Making Connections with Stories

- ◇ What stories will be told about this time and place 100 years from now? Ask children to consider what stories they will tell when they are elders.
- ◇ Get creative and make a story that describes the journey of this plant. What does this story teach us about healthy relationships with place and with others?

Making Relations with Lands & Waters

- ◇ Take the perspective of plants. What might they be thinking or feeling about being in this place? What might other plants think about their new neighbors?
- ◇ What are things that you can do to contribute to more healthy plant relationships in this place? You might get involved in restoration efforts near you.

Decolonization, Resurgence & Good Relations

Discuss changes in the land that have come about due to colonization and what we can do to address them.

Consider the terms “weed” and “invasive.” Where do these terms come from and what do they suggest about plants? Ask your elders for teachings about these plants.