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Plant lovers want nurseries to stop selling invasive plants Ap Associated Press

By John Seewer, Associated Press Writer | June 2, 2007

TOLEDO, Ohio --Bamboo-like plants that grow taller than adults have choked out native plants in a marsh that once teemed with life along Lake Erie.

Wild flowers have disappeared. Migrating birds have gone elsewhere.

The parkland has changed so much that Dana Bollin, the naturalist at Maumee Bay State Park, no longer leads tours along its boardwalk. "I hate to spend an hour talking about invasive plants," she said.

In Michigan, exotic plant species are destroying or threatening habitats along sand dunes. In Florida, swamps are a target.

Environmental groups hope to slow the spread by persuading nurseries to stop selling invasive plants and promote native species.

In California, a partnership of nursery owners and environmental leaders is working on a campaign called "Plant Right" that will roll out early next year and give gardeners brochures to help them find native plants suited for their regions.

Florida's highway department announced last fall it will stop planting invasive plants along its roads.

Big-box retailer Meijer Inc. announced in March it is removing two invasive trees -- Norway maple and Lombardy poplar -- from its stores in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky.

Only a small percentage of plants sold in nurseries are troublemakers that crowd out other plants and rob animals of their food sources.

But environmental groups say these non-native plants can end up in the hands of gardeners or landscapers who only later find out how quickly they can take over a backyard.

Some invasives, like Norway maples and Japanese barberry, are still big sellers.

Often, there's little information about invasives at nurseries for

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gardeners browsing for spring plants. Adding to the confusion is that plants that are fine in one state can cause trouble in another.

Take baby's breath, for example.

It's not among the worst non-native plants, and isn't a problem in most places. But not many gardeners know that it is taking over the natural grasses that help stabilize sand dunes along Lake Michigan.

"It's a cute name and you think it's so harmless," said Melissa Soule, a spokeswoman for The Nature Conservancy in Michigan. "A lot of names for these things are even a problem."

That's why many groups fighting against invasive plants are encouraging nurseries to give customers more information about what plants are best.

They hope consumers will embrace native plants as they have home-grown organic vegetables. "It's buying local and trying to be more natural," Soule said.

Meijer stores in the Midwest now have brochures in their garden departments promoting native plants and tags on plants and trees that are recommended by The Nature Conservancy.

"We can reach everyday shoppers and help them understand there is a choice that can be made," said Meijer spokeswoman Stacie Behler. [Continued...](#)

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