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Letters to the Editor

Opinion: Ah, to see native flora in our local lands

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Woods and plants in the Parkfairfax neighborhood of Alexandria in 2020. (Jennifer Beeson Gregory/The Washington Post)

Reading the March 13 Travel article about visiting native plant gardens in the Mid-Atlantic region, “[Wherever you drive, a slight detour can put you in the middle of native flora](#),” I was struck that we have to drive somewhere to see native flora that should be abundant in all our natural areas.

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Our forest floors should be carpeted with Virginia bluebells, trillium, skunk cabbage, jewelweed, ferns, spring beauty, trout lily, columbine and more. Instead, we see a plague of English ivy, winter creeper, vinca, honeysuckle vine, lesser celandine and multiflora rose. The understory is overwhelmed by privet, burning bush, Japanese holly and Asian bush honeysuckle, and the edges by bamboo groves and Callery pear. Countless trees are girdled and smothered by invasive vines.

This mishmash of invasive vegetation from Asia and Europe supplants the native flora, creating a weird chimerical zone, monstrous but sterile, incapable of supporting life, a canceled habitat, spawning vast food deserts for birds and insects alike.

These exotic plants, introduced by the nursery trade, spread from our yards into parks, woods, streams and roadsides. In the tri-state area, only [Maryland has placed restrictions](#) on Big Horticulture: Sales of the popular yellow flag iris and winter creeper are banned, and 13 invasive plant species must be labeled as invasive at point of sale. This year, in Richmond, a [bill to label invasive plants in garden centers failed](#).

Meanwhile, apart from county herbicide crews, removing invasive growth on public lands is left to volunteers. So if you want to see native plants, be prepared for a road trip to specially curated outdoor spaces: nature museums.

Avril Garland, Vienna

The writer is a volunteer invasive site leader with Fairfax County Park Authority.