

6. Additional Research Projects/Assignments

1. Taking it to the streets: mapping local invasive plants

Get a regional map to post in the classroom and provide students with a photo flip book or identification book of non-native plants (contact your local Cooperative Extension or Soil and Water Conservation District office). Using local maps, have students conduct a survey of the area around their home or school. Have everyone mark their maps with colored dots that correspond to a particular non-native plant. For example, green dots can represent common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale ssp. officinale*) and have everyone post their records on the regional map in the classroom with push pins. Where were most of the non-natives found? Were there any invasives found? What was the most common species? The least common? (In Southcentral Alaska, this exercise is easiest early in the fall when plants are still in flower)

2. Get the word out: make an invasive plant poster

Collect information about an invasive weed and have students create a poster with a detailed photo or drawing and essential info to help people understand the problems it can cause. Many problematic plants are introduced by unwary gardeners and homeowners. The poster should clearly explain why it is a problem and maybe provide a similar alternative. Some invasive ornamentals planted in Alaska include: ornamental jewelweed, purple loosestrife, orange hawkweed and common or garden tansy. Hang the posters in a public place and help “spread the word, not the weed!”

3. Science fair or “Caring for the Kenai” Project Ideas

- Undertake a control project on a local infestation of an invasive plant (get permission first) and monitor the effectiveness of different treatments.
- Test for invasive plants in “wildflower” seed packets, bird seed mixes or samples of imported hay by planting them indoors and identifying the plants at maturity.
- Experiment with growing native plants or make an educational booklet to help gardeners learn about the problems that invasive plants can cause. Check out Alaska’s Plant Materials Center website at http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/ag/ag_PMCPlantFlyers.htm for planting guides of select native species.
- Conduct a poll to determine how many people know about invasive plants. How many do they know? Do they know where they came from? What about greenhouse owners and landscapers?
- Make “invasive alternative” seed packets with educational info about problem plants to give away to parents or as a fundraiser.

INVASIVE PLANTS TAKING ROOT IN ALASKA

- Test the germination of non-native plants compared to native plants. Compare growth rates or effectiveness of a control method.

4. Get the word out: show what you know

Have your students come up with a creative way to teach a middle school class what they have learned about invasive plants. Have them make a handout or a booklet that will help them identify what plants are invasive, non-native and native. Maybe collect plants from the field and have students try to label them with “noxious weed” (listed by Alaska Dept. of Agriculture in AS 03.05.010), “invasive”, “ornamental” and “native” (some plants may have more than one label).