



BEVERLY SHORES

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP
PROMOTING & PROTECTING ECOLOGICAL HARMONY

Multiflora Rose

Terry Bonace

Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*), a major ecological pest, has reached such levels of abundance that it can easily be seen along most of our roadsides in early June when it is in full bloom. How it became so widespread will be a familiar story to those of you following this series of articles. Multiflora rose was first introduced into the United States from Asia in the 1860s to be used as root stock for ornamental roses. Rootstocks are usually chosen from plants that will provide strong, healthy, disease resistant roots. These roots are grafted to a somewhat more tender above-ground plant of a closely related species. Later, in the 1930s, the Soil Conservation Service encouraged the use of multiflora rose for erosion control and a "living fence." A 1950 article from the U.S. Department of Agriculture extolls the virtues of multiflora rose: "Chief among these is the fact that it will make a living fence that will keep both your livestock and your soil within its boundaries. It is also the least expensive fence that you can establish and the cheapest to maintain. One thousand plants will give you 1,000 feet of living fence. Where fences of wire or wood do not shelter birds or rabbits, multiflora rose furnishes welcome cover for farm wildlife. As compared with the usual fence, a living fence of multiflora rose is a thing of lasting beauty..."



Multiflora Rose

If you have ever tried to remove multiflora rose, you will well understand how eventually its persistent, spreading growth habit was found to be a problem (and what a good "fence" it makes). Multiflora rose is now regulated in at least 12 states, in several as a "noxious weed." In Indiana, it cannot legally be planted without a permit from the state and only for certain uses like experimentation and root grafting. Multiflora rose rapidly outcompetes surrounding vegetation, forming dense thickets and smothering out native plants. The canes, which can grow as tall as 15 feet, send up new shoots when they come in contact with soil. A single plant can produce 500,000 or more seeds. These seeds, dispersed by birds, can remain viable for 10-20 years in the soil.

There are several native wild roses that grow in Beverly Shores, but each is easily distinguished from multiflora rose. The showiest of these is the swamp rose. You can see throughout much of the summer along the edge of wet areas on Broadway and Beverly Drive. Swamp rose is often tall and stands out well among the wetland vegetation with a showy, pink, and very fragrant flower. Less showy but still common is the pasture rose or Carolina rose. This one grows in dryer habitats lower to the ground and is also pink and fragrant. These two roses are worth the time to stop and smell. Multiflora rose grows in a wide range of habitats from full sun to nearly full shade. It is distinguished from these other two native roses most easily by its elongated clusters of small white, flowers.

At certain stages, wild blackberry and black raspberry could be mistaken for multiflora rose because of their thorny, bramble like habit. The flowers are somewhat similar too, since the berries are in the rose family. However, when the fruit appears, any doubts should be eliminated. The wild blackberry also has a powdery bloom on its stems that can be rubbed off.

Though one can find multiflora rose, particularly its seeds, for sale on the Internet, it does not appear to be planted any more in Beverly Shores. The main problem is trying to control or eliminate it. If you have the right equipment, like a strong mower, sometimes repeated cutting can keep multiflora rose under control. Stems should be cut at least once per growing season as close to ground level as possible. For large thickets of multiflora rose where risk to other species is minimal, spray the foliage with a glyphosate ("Roundup") containing herbicide. Thoroughly wet all leaves. When you are concerned with neighboring plants, the best method is to cut the rose to stumps and to carefully treat the stumps with glyphosate. This last method can be used when the rose is dormant or growing. As always, when using herbicides and other pesticides, be sure to follow the label directions as required by state and federal law.

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