



I hunt, but MY target

Childhood field day

When I was a kid, after my Dad would plow the fields, we would wait for rain to wash mud off the rocks. Soon after, we would set out as a family to walk the fields in search of Native American arrowheads.

Each of us took three rows, made by the plow disks, so we wouldn't miss an inch of the field. Each outing, at least one of us would get lucky to find a broken piece or even an intact arrowhead. Finding one took pure concentration and patience. Then the amazement of holding such an artifact in our hands was thrilling. Once you get an eye for something by simply spending time hunting for it, you will get hooked into whatever you are looking for.



Amy Collett

Humans are hunters and gatherers by nature. We hunt everything from big game to rocks to photo opportunities.

Noxious weeds literally stand out like a sore thumb for a plant nerd like myself. At any moment in the great outdoors, I see them. Especially on vacations, while blissfully hiking in the mountains, or even driving 65 mph down the interstate. I then grab the camera and take a few shots of the weed: up close of the flowers and leaves, the whole plant, and a scenic shot of the infestation.

For those not in the invasive plant realm already, how does one even begin to identify what's a weed and what's not? Here are a few tips to get you started.

Tip 1: Become familiar with the native species

Living in the West probably means spending a lot of time outdoors. We are lucky to have many weed-free areas with a healthy array of wildflowers. Are you familiar with the Wyoming state flower, Indian paintbrush? Get a local wildflower guide and become familiar with native plants so you will be able to notice when something does not fit in. A healthy plant community will have a variety of grasses, forbs (such as wildflowers), shrubs, and trees. When wildflowers are blooming, there is a mix of colors creating a natural bouquet.

Tip 2: Visit your local Weed & Pest District

Visit a local weed and pest office for handouts describing some of the common invasive plants. Here is a link to the district offices: bit.ly/weed-andpestoffices. You can also visit the Wyoming Weed and Pest Council (WWPC) website and take a look at the State Designated Weed and Pest list: bit.ly/badweeds. The WWPC also has a great little pocket guide that may be available for a few bucks or even free upon request at your local district office.

Tip 3: Know where invasive plants are commonly found

If you hunt deer, knowing that deer are browsers is important. They eat woody vegetation, so you hunt for them where their food is. A similar concept works for invasive plants. Disturbed areas are prime locations where invasive species are introduced. Examples include trails, roadways, pathways, parking lots, and building sites. Weed seeds in disturbed areas could be spread by muddy excavation equipment, seed mixes used to revegetate the disturbed area, or they could have hitched a ride on vehicles, pets, or even our own clothing.

Tip 4: Look for out-of-place plants

You will notice something out of place once you've started taking mental notes of what the native ecosystem is supposed to look like. Look for different colors and plant

can be rooted in plain sight

shapes. Something that doesn't look like the "norm" might be an indicator of an invasive plant; however, do your best to identify the plant as a weed before digging it up or using other control measures – just in case you have found a native plant that isn't very common or is just new to you. Invasive plants out-compete native plants and can form a monoculture, a dense stand of a single species. Invasive plant monocultures reduce species diversity, causing biological pollution. These changes in the plant community often greatly reduce the quality and quantity of fish and wildlife habitat.

Tip 5: Are animals avoiding it?

Pastures are an ideal location to observe animals that are possibly avoiding certain plants. Livestock will often avoid plants that may irritate their mouths or cause them other harm, unless they have no other grazing choices. Some may be poisonous native plant species, but it is also a good way to pick out invasive plants.

Tip 6: Make "Play Clean Go" a habit

While out "hunting" invasive plants, be sure you aren't accidentally helping them move about - prevention is the cheapest and most effective invasive species management.

Positive action can make a difference in preventing their spread. We



A near monoculture of Dalmatian toadflax fills this field.

are using PlayCleanGo (bit.ly/play-cleango) to encourage everyone to Stop Invasive Species in Your Tracks!

It's simple: Remove plants and mud from boots, gear, pets, and vehicles. Clean gear before entering and leaving a recreation site. Stay on designated roads and trails. Use certified or local firewood and hay.

Please make this simple call-to-action a part of your routine when

recreating in the outdoors. Learn more by searching #PlayCleanGo on social media and following some of the over 300 PlayCleanGo partners!

Please report any invasive plant infestation you find to your local Weed and Pest District office. There is also an app and website called EDDMapS West. Visit www.edd-maps.org/west for more information.

There MIGHT be a giant sign in Amy Collett's office displaying "Weed" with a slash through the four-letter word. She is the marketing and education program coordinator with the Teton County Weed and Pest District. She can be reached at acollett@tcweed.org or (307) 733-8419.