



Invasive Species Leaflet



Excerpted with permission from "Invasive Exotic Plants of North Carolina"
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Wisteria floribunda (Japanese Wisteria)
Wisteria sinensis (Chinese Wisteria)

Initial Introduction and Expansion in Range

These two exotic wisteria species were brought to the United States in the first half of the 19th century as ornamental vines. A stunning bloomer, it is not difficult to understand why these plants became a favorite choice for garden arbors, gazebos, porches and walls. The drooping clusters of fragrant bluish-purple or white flowers are absolute head-turners in the spring. These invasive vines are now found extensively throughout the eastern United States.



Appearing not to be widely spread by seed, exotic wisteria colonizes primarily by the spread of runners that develop roots and shoots at short intervals.

It is believed that the large seed size of these plants is a deterrent to animal dispersal though seeds may be carried downstream in water for great distances.

Description and Biology

- Deciduous, woody vine capable of growing up to 70 feet long and 10 inches in diameter.
- *Wisteria floribunda* has whitish bark and the vines twine clockwise around the host plant (as viewed from the top). *Wisteria sinensis* twines counter-clockwise.
- Alternate, compound leaves comprised of seven to 13 (Chinese) and 13 to 19 (Japanese) leaflets. Leaflets are tapered at the tip with wavy edges.
- Showy, fragrant, violet to blue-violet flowers festoon the vines in April and May.
- Fruits are velvety brown, bean-like pods, 4 to 6 inches long.
- Resembles our native *Wisteria frutescens* (American wisteria) except that this species produces smooth pods.



Habitats Susceptible to Invasion

Most infestations of exotic wisteria in natural areas have escaped from landscape plantings around old home sites. Once they escape, exotic wisteria can wreak havoc on surrounding native vegetation through shading and girdling. Climbing wisteria vines have the ability to strangle and kill mature trees, opening the forest canopy and making conditions more favorable to their own aggressive growth. Exotic wisteria thrives in full sunlight but can persist and reproduce in partial shade. These vines are commonly seen growing along forest edges and roadsides.

Prevention and Control

As enticing as it is to plant exotic wisteria, it would be best for the environment if these plants were removed from commercial trade altogether. Our native *W. frutescens* is every bit as stunning in the spring with no detrimental environmental effects. Unfortunately, to date it has been much more difficult to find in commercial trade.

Once established, exotic wisteria is extremely difficult to control. Only small initial infestations can be controlled manually because of the extensive runner and root systems of these plants.

An infestation of any appreciable size will usually require a combination of cut stump and foliar herbicide treatments. Where vines have grown into the tree canopy, cut each stem as close to the ground as possible, cut again a little higher up, and remove the cut pieces. Treat the freshly cut surface of the rooted stem with a 50 percent solution of triclopyr. It will usually not be possible to remove all of the twining vines from desirable trees and shrubs, but at least these vines will die and not continue to spread.

Groundcovers of exotic wisteria can be treated with a foliar solution of 2 percent glyphosate or triclopyr plus a 0.5 percent non-ionic surfactant to thoroughly wet all of the leaves. Exotic wisteria is best treated from the spring to fall when air temperatures are above 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Repeated treatments will likely be necessary for complete control.

THE LABEL IS THE LAW!

WHEN USING ANY PESTICIDE, FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS

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Wisteria photography by Mike Kunz, N.C. Botanical Garden (*left*) and Chris Evans, River to River CWMA, Bugwood.com (*right*).

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