



“ Banned and Beautiful” Exhibit at 2008 Big E

Massachusetts Conservation Districts educate the public about invasive plants at “The Big E”

Massachusetts Conservation Districts had prime real estate in the Massachusetts Building at the 2008 Eastern States Exposition – a.k.a. The Big E – in West Springfield. Through an interactive exhibit titled “Banned and Beautiful,” districts educated the public about invasive plants in Massachusetts.

Designed and coordinated by NRCS Visual Information Specialist Catherine Ulitsky, the exhibit featured live invasive plants including purple loosestrife, phragmites, barberry, winged euonymus (burning bush), autumn olive, oriental bittersweet, goutweed and kudzu. Signs provided information about specific plants: how to identify them, habitat where they're found, the threats they pose, geographic distribution and their origin.



Overall view of exhibit showing invasive plants, question boards, signage and sales cart .

Some of the plants were dug in the wild by Joan Deely, Administrator for the Franklin Conservation District, John Savello, Supervisor for the Middlesex Conservation District, and Rudy Chlanda, NRCS Geologist.

Other plants – including the large kudzu – were loaned by UMass Amherst weed specialist Randy Prostack. Randy also provided technical assistance in developing a “wish list” of invasive plants to feature.



Fairgoers got a close up look at a range of invasive plants, from purple loosestrife to kudzu.



Educational signs informed the public about specific invasive plants.

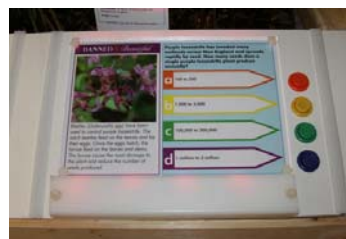


Many visitors were surprised to learn that Winged Euonymus - Burning Bush—is considered invasive.

Fairgoers were able to test their knowledge of invasive plants by answering multiple choice questions on eight electronic “quiz boards” that lit up red if the answer was wrong and flashed green and red for a correct answer. The exhibit also included signage to inform the public about Conservation Districts.



A map and informational signage informed visitors about Massachusetts Conservation Districts.



Booth visitors tested their knowledge of invasive plants by answering questions on eight quiz boards.

District volunteers staffed the exhibit on a number of days during the fair, some selling items such as seedlings, bulbs and gardening accessories. Staffers reported strong public interest in the invasive plant topic.

Each year 1.2 million fairgoers attend the 17 day Big E, the nation’s ninth largest fair, and 600,000 of them pass through the Massachusetts Building.



Cara Eleniefsky (left) of the Plymouth County Conservation District works the booth with Earth Team volunteers.