

The Russian-olive Tree – Why is it so bad?

You've probably seen groves of Russian-olive trees in Westminster's open space. Their graygreen leaves and fragrant blossoms make them stand out in the crowd. The problem with Russian-olive trees? They become the crowd! These trees are considered a noxious weed in Colorado, which means local government is required to manage and limit their spread.

What is so bad about this tree, especially considering the known value of trees? Russian-olive trees are a thorny, hard-wood tree that easily takes over riparian (river bank) corridors, choking out native cottonwoods, boxelders, and willows. They out-compete other native vegetation, interfering with natural plant succession. These trees can be such an entangled mess they also choke out creeks and canals, interfering with stream flow.

Westminster staff and volunteers have noticed another aspect of Russian-olive trees. Beavers don't like them! When beavers move into an area (which is common in Westminster), they gnaw down trees like cottonwoods, oaks, and willows for their dams. They don't like the Russian-olive trees, however, which gives this weed another opportunity to take over these areas.

Research indicates that the hard wood of Russian-olive trees does not support a healthy insect population, which can result in decreased song bird populations. A day on the trail without the beautiful sound of birds just isn't the same! The overabundance of Russian-olive trees does not support as high a concentration of wildlife as native vegetation.

Westminster has dedicated time, funding, and machinery to the eradication of Russian-olive trees in Westminster. The volunteers known as Russian-olive Terminators (ROT) have been helping in these efforts for 20 years, and have made an amazing impact on the health and vitality of Westminster's open space. We couldn't do it without them!