

Make Your Own Seed Balls

Learn About Invasive and Non-Native Species
with Great Smoky Mountains National Park



Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a world-renowned preserve of wildflower diversity—over 1,500 species of flowering plants are found in the park, more than in any other North American national park. Unfortunately, hundreds of non-native plants have been introduced to the park.

Non-native species are plants and animals that do not occur naturally in an area but are introduced due to deliberate or accidental human activities. **Invasive species** are non-native species that cause harm to the environment, economy, human, animal, or plant health.

Background:

Most non-native plants in the Great Smoky Mountains do not hinder or prevent the survival of native plants within the ecosystem; they simply exist where they have not naturally occurred. However, 35 species are aggressive and seriously threaten the park's natural ecosystems.

One example of an invasive species in the Smokies is the Japanese honeysuckle. Japanese honeysuckle was brought from Japan to New York in 1806 for decorative use and erosion control, but quickly became invasive. In the Smokies, it is capable of out-competing native ground cover and overtopping shrubs and small trees.

While invasive species still threaten parts of the Smokies, in 2014, the National Park Service successfully restored a critical wetland habitat by removing invasives and planting native wetland species. They removed more than 540 Japanese honeysuckle in one year and planted over 500 native seedlings!



You can help protect your environment against invasives by consciously choosing to plant native species instead. Native plants are suited to thrive in the climate and soil conditions where they naturally occur. They provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, insects, birds, and other animals. In this activity, you will create “seed balls” with seeds of native species to plant in your yard, garden, or flower pot.

Materials:

- Native meadow flower seeds
- Soil
- Water
- Powdered clay (found in craft shops)
- Mixing bowl



Photo: NPS



Procedure:

- In a bowl, mix 1 cup of seeds with 5 cups of soil and 2-3 cups of clay powder.
 - If it's available, compost soil is recommended to help your seeds grow.
- Slowly mix in water with your hands until everything sticks together.
- Roll the mixture into firm balls.
- Leave the balls to dry in a sunny spot.
- Plant your seed balls in your yard, garden, or flower pot, and wait to see what grows!