

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of **invasive species**.



Activity 12: Invasive Species

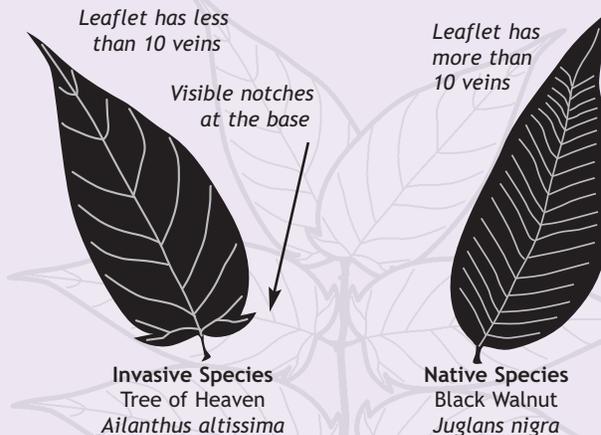
Moving plant and animal species to new environments can be beneficial, but can often cause environmental and economic harm.

Doing the Activity

The next time you are outdoors, introduce the term **invasive species** to children and discuss its meaning by asking:

- How would this area look different if a family of elephants lived here?
- What impact would the elephants have on the plants and animals nearby?
- Where do elephants live in the wild? Why don’t elephants live here?

Of course, elephants have not invaded woodlands of the United States, but invasive species are impacting local forest ecosystems. For example, Tree of Heaven (or *Ailanthus*) is an invasive plant originally from central China, now found in 30 U.S. states. It is often mistaken for the native Black Walnut and left to grow and reproduce. Tree of Heaven grows rapidly, is difficult to remove, and displaces native plants. Both species have **compound leaves**, but can you identify the differences between the leaflets?



Fill in the vowels to identify common characteristics of invasive species.

1. Have a short l_f_cycll and produce many ffsprng
2. Grw very quickly
3. Are not affected by natural prd_trs in their new hb_tts
4. Sprnd quickly and easily to new c_systms
5. Often tlr_ta wide range of different nv_r_nmnts

Adapted from Activity 12: Invasive Species from Project Learning Tree’s *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!

- Attend, host, or sponsor a local PLT workshop to receive activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- To contact your local PLT State Coordinator, visit www.plt.org or call 202-463-2475.



Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation.