

# *We Hopped Right on This*

BY LORI CAPONE, CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

With its freshly paved surface and new landscaping taking root, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) is coming into focus. But it has brought more than a new recreational opportunity to Sudbury. It brought a new invasive plant, Japanese Hop (*Humulus japonicus*).

When the Conservation Office was notified that there might be Japanese Hop growing along the BFRT, the conservation staff took swift action. **Japanese Hop is an aggressive, climbing vine that can grow 20-30 feet in one growing season, quickly smothering adjacent vegetation.** We immediately identified and investigated the extent of infestation. The bad news was that it was present throughout the corridor. The good news was that the plant was just about to flower and form seeds, so we had one month to make sure this plant was removed from the corridor.

MassDOT was informed of this plant and presented an action plan to the Conservation Commission at their July 29th meeting. This plan relied heavily on focused herbicide treatment but was the only way to be able to eliminate the threat given the timeframe we were faced with. MassDOT immediately implemented the plan, which was very effective. However, additional attention is needed to ensure no plants or seeds escaped.

Their rapid growth and aggressive spreading behavior can allow them to quickly dominate the landscape, posing significant ecological challenges, threatening native plant communities and altering local ecosystems. They can form dense mats several feet deep, blocking light to plants underneath. Growth is less vigorous in shade and on drier soils, but it can grow in disturbed areas with fairly moist soils, including roadsides and forest edges, the type of environment present along the rail trail.

We need *your* help to ensure this plant does not get established in Sudbury.



Japanese Hop

# Japanese Hop, cont.

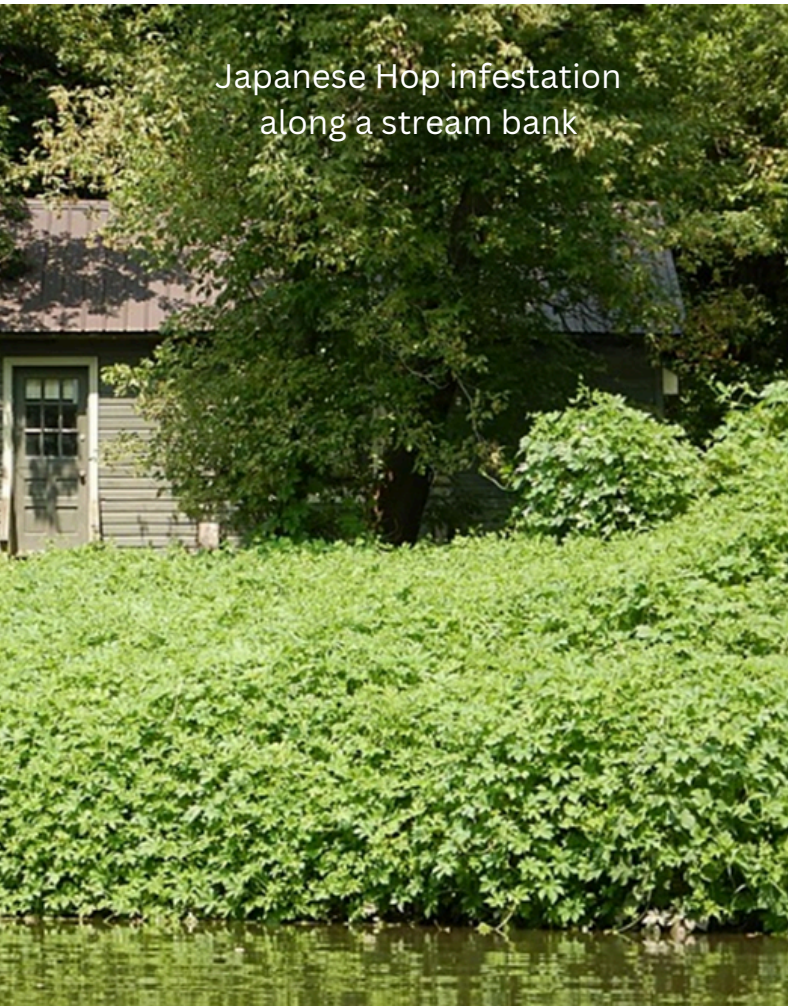
The leaves of the hops are similar to two of our native vines, Virginia creeper and grape, yet are quite distinct with its 5-7 serrated lobed leaves, on a very sticky vine. If you brush past it, it will grab onto you and your pets. It wraps itself around adjacent vegetation similar to bittersweet but the plants die back completely every year. It spreads through seeds which can be dispersed on clothing, pets, wind, and equipment from infested areas. Flowering occurs in July and August with seeds maturing through September. After that, growth slows and the plants begin to decline. The first hard frost of autumn kills the vines and they quickly disintegrate.

Since it is an annual plant, hand pulling or repeatedly mowing plants before they go to seed is the best management technique. Pulling is an effective method but care must be taken to remove the root and not just break the stem off at ground level. Hand weeding needs to be started early in the growing season (April - May) while the roots are small and before the vines become tangled with other vegetation. Monthly pulling and monitoring will be needed until the infestation is eradicated. This plant can quickly irritate your skin, so if you do remove it, please wear gloves and a long-sleeved shirt and pants.

The seeds are viable for about three years. Areas where the hops were most prevalent are at Parkinson's Field and along Route 117 between Davis Farm and Davis Field. In the late Fall, small plants were also popping up along the future Mass Central Rail Trail corridor. Therefore we must remain vigilant over the next few years to ensure this plant is eradicated from Sudbury. **If you do see this plant in your yards please contact us as we would like to track its presence.** Feel free to send us a picture if you are unsure whether you have this plant in your yard. This is particularly threatening to our streams.

With the rail trails crossing both Hop and Pantry Brooks, help us keep this plant from *hopping* into our waterways.

For more information on invasive species you may have in your yard, please see our Invasive Plants and Insects of Sudbury page at: <https://sudbury.ma.us/conservation/invasive-plants-and-insects-of-sudbury/>.



Japanese Hop infestation along a stream bank