

Youth Volunteer Program Guide

Cultivating a Community of Forest Stewards
through Invasive Plant Workdays



2022



Produced as a collaboration between
VT Dept. Forests, Parks & Recreation
and Winooski Valley Park District



Adapting a Program

ADAPTING YOUR PROGRAM TO VARIOUS GROUPS

Most of our work was done with middle school-aged volunteers, and we've adapted those lessons learned for a variety of groups. See the following considerations if you'd like to [work with a different age group](#).

- Elementary school.
 - Younger people are physically smaller, so the tools may be difficult to use. Stress teamwork for pulling big invasive plants and the value of pulling lots of little invasive plants.
 - Attention spans are shorter with this age group, so work periods should be, too. Plan for more activities to account for shorter work periods.
 - Skip the competition – younger people end up feeling bad about losing the competition rather than good about the fact that they helped the environment. Instead, focus on how much they can achieve as a group and as a class.
 - Skip the skits – this age group often have a hard time coming up with their own ideas for presentations.
- High school.
 - Having a shorter day focused solely on invasive plant removal and/or restoration plantings rather than a longer day that also incorporates activities often works best.
 - With technical schools or classrooms where the teacher has an interest, you can go over management plans or do a mapping activity, just check with the teachers beforehand about their interest and ability.
- Adults.
 - Adult programs and middle school programs can have a very similar theme and message.
 - Can have multiple work periods instead of activities.

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- Can use saws, work with or near thorny or toxic invasive plants (although we recommend not exclusively thorny or toxic invasive plants—and always stress precautions), can focus on prolific herbaceous species like garlic mustard for a bit longer.
 - Large groups (40 – 100 participants).
 - Have someone whose sole role is to facilitate the day — answering questions, keeping track of time, etc.
 - Maintain clear and consistent communication both with group leaders and subgroup leaders (chaperones and invasive plant “experts”).
 - Make things as simple as possible for subgroup leaders.
 - Use *predetermined* schedules, subgroups, roles, and activities to keep things organized.
 - Allow for more transition time between activities in the schedule.
 - Keep education periods short and try to do more in subgroups because it can be challenging to keep all those people focused in an outdoor setting.
 - Bathroom and water facilities become a lot more important, if not required.
 - FOR ALL GROUPS—Keep time in mind, and be ready to adapt.
 - Communicate clearly about schedule needs – travel time, mandatory snack or lunch breaks, etc.
 - When working with schools, find out when they need to be back at school, then reverse engineer the time your program must end.
 - When working with schools, there is always the option to do the education portion in the classroom, then a field excursion — this can be particularly useful if the weather is questionable or if you only have a half day outdoors.

Adapting a Program

- Half vs. full day.
 - Pros and cons to both – being clear about the goals of your program will help you choose how long the day should be.
 - 2 hours is the shortest a program can be and still cover everything necessary.

MAKE THE PROGRAM YOUR OWN

- Enthusiasm is contagious! If you are excited about something it will show. Incorporate topics and examples you find interesting.
- The contents of this guide are meant to be helpful suggestions. The program is flexible and adaptable – every person and situation is different and everyone has their own teaching style. Modify it to something that works for you!
- Have fun!

You Can Make A Difference!

VTinvasives.org



For questions about this guide
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Latest update: April 2022