Some exotic ornamental plants behave badly when they escape from their intended establishment. Infestations have negative impacts on natural plant communities. Two examples are: *Liriope muscari* and *Liriope spicata*; common name: Monkey Grass or Lilyturf

*Liriope muscari* (Big Blue Lilyturf) and *Liriope spicata* (Creeping Lilyturf) are native to China and Japan. These may be the most common exotic ornamentals planted for ground cover. *Liriope* is often called “Monkey Grass” due to the grass-like leaves and clumping form. *L. muscari* displays purple flowers while *L. spicata* flowers are white or lavender and has much narrower leaves.

*Liriope* species tolerate a wide range of light and soil conditions, as well as heat, humidity and drought. Both species spread vegetatively by radiating rhizomes. Taproots of young plants eventually become fibrous filling the upper 6 to 12 inches of soil. Roots of *Liriope* produce scattered small, fleshy, peanut-shaped corms that can sprout as well. *Liriope muscari* expands by short stolons. *Liriope spicata* is more aggressive with long rhizomes and has been observed growing below cement emerging on the other side. Seeds can be spread by birds and mammals. Rhizomes and corms are often spread via soil movement.

The National Park Service has identified *L. spicata* as an emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region. Both *Liriope* species are included in the U.S. Forest Service publication “Invasive Plants of Southern Forests,” by James Miller, Erwin Chambliss, and Nancy Lowenstein (General Technical Report SRS-119). The Georgia Invasive Species Taskforce lists *L. muscari* as a Species of Concern, while the S.C. Exotic Pest Plant Council lists it as an Alert species. Gardening guides warn that “unwanted growth is very hard to remove, much harder than turfgrass.”

The fact is that both *Liriope* species can escape into natural areas. Spread is most rapid on moist, highly organic soils. The most extensive infestations of *Liriope* are typically found at old abandoned home sites and in woods adjacent to neighborhoods. Solid infestations of *Liriope* displace native plants to form monocultures. In many southern forests, the native ground-layer community is highly diverse; supporting countless beneficial insects, songbirds, game birds, small and large mammals. Exotic plant monocultures can severely degrade natural habitats and contribute to population declines of native flora and fauna.

*Liriope control*: Winter is the best time for control. Clip leaves, wait for re-sprout, and spray new growth with glyphosate or diquat. Shield nontarget plants with cardboard. Repeat treatment. Dig up *Liriope* patches and put down weed fabric or put weed fabric directly over plants.

Please consider selling and planting native alternatives such as: *Sisyrinchium angustifolium* (Narrow Leaved Blue-eyed Grass), *Salvia lyrata* (Lyre-leaf sage), *Dryopteris cristata* (Crested woodfern), *Polystichum acrostichoides* (Christmas Fern), or *Carex blanda* (Eastern Woodland Sedge).

Online resources: [http://www.invasive.org/publications/ipsf/BigBlueLilyturf.pdf](http://www.invasive.org/publications/ipsf/BigBlueLilyturf.pdf)  