

Native Woody Species:

The native species of sumac (staghorn and smooth) and boxelder are not significant components of this native plant community. If Valhalla Park is being managed to restore “southern mesic oak-basswood forest” (for example), then these species should be removed in addition to the invasives. This is the most straightforward justification for targeting these species.

Apart from this ecological perspective, each of these species has properties that make its management a concern in ecological restoration.

STAGHORN (AND SMOOTH) SUMAC. Sumac can be an aggressive invader of cleared sites, forming extensive and dense colonies via rhizomes. The colonies are so densely leafy as to suppressive almost all vegetation beneath them, preventing the establishment of any competing native woody species. For this reason it is often considered an invasive native woody species. It will aggressively colonize, for example, abandoned agricultural fields or prairies and savannas whose natural fire cycles have been interrupted. Once established, sumac can be extremely difficult to eradicate from a site. For example, at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in Anoka and Isanti Counties of Minnesota, sumac could be controlled only with repeated burning. Sumac colonies are most effectively eradicated by herbicidal treatments.

<https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/rhutyp/all.html>

<https://pleasantvalleyconservancy.org/sumac.html>

<https://www.cedarcreek.umn.edu/conservation/habitats/savanna>

<https://oaksavannas.org/invasives.html>

BOXELDER. Boxelder is not generally considered “invasive” in the way that sumac is. It is more often considered a “weed tree”, not particularly desirable in urban or recreational locations due to its leaning or sprawling habit (often with multiple main stems that tip to reach nearly horizontally along the ground), messy branches that easily break off and litter the forest floor (thus extremely susceptible to wind disturbance), short lifespan (~75 years), and tendency to attract swarms of boxelder bugs. Because it is shorter than canopy species and only moderately shade-tolerant, it thrives in forest margins and canopy gaps. While an associate species of many forest types, it is never the dominant species. In a location like Valhalla Park, with a high ratio of margin to core habitat (meaning, lots of edge), boxelder may be over-represented in the species mix. The decision to control for it may be ecological (preserving more “core” habitat type), but also motivated by issues of aesthetics and accessibility (a forest with a high proportion of boxelder, especially at the margin, will be hard to wander through).

<https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/tree/aceneg/all.html>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/a-tree-too-many-names>