

Invasive species adapt to change faster than natives

By Michelle Nijhuis, Smithsonian

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the growing season in many areas of the lower 48 states has expanded by about two weeks. Frosts end earlier in the spring and begin later in the fall. To gardeners in Maine, Wisconsin and Montana, that might seem a blessing. What's not to like about more lettuce or riper tomatoes?

The longer seasons, however, are also helping invasive plants annex American soil; extended springs mean they can more quickly push aside native species and transform ecosystems.

Researchers found that many nonnative species are changing their flowering schedule in concert with the longer growing season. By contrast, indigenous species have been, on average, much slower to react to the new conditions.

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