

Invasive Plants: The Unwelcome Exotics



Photo by Higher Ground: The air potato is one of many invasive exotic plants that gardeners sometimes plant and which escape into natural areas, becoming very invasive.

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While driving through Leon County and the city of Tallahassee along with other surrounding areas, my eyes wander the ditches, yards, and natural areas. I am searching for the unwanted interlopers that tend to haunt me both at work and during relaxation. Witnessing the alien invasion with my own two eyes has been both a disturbing and rude awakening for me. Some of these exotic invaders may have been planted intentionally, while others spread through their natural vegetative process. Some people think, “As long as it’s green, aesthetically pleasing, and I don’t have to take care of it, then it’s good, right?” No! These plants are harmful; replacing them with alternative non-invasive plantings is the answer to that problem.

Because of Florida’s climate, the state is prone to the introduction and naturalization of non-native organisms. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council has compiled a list of invasive plants in order to help prioritize management efforts for environmental and educational purposes. There are two categories in this list. The plants listed in the first category are documented to have affected native plant communities. By causing ecological damage through habitat loss, threatening endangered species of plants and animals, these Category I species negatively alter Florida’s biodiversity.

Category II plants have been determined to be increasing in overall numbers and have the potential to be added to the first list in the future. This listing may be found at the FLEPPC website (www.fleppc.org/database/data_intro.htm).

You might have an invasive plant growing in your yard and not even know it. I recognize a lot of them growing in people’s front yards. The most common Category I invasive plant that I see overall in our area is the mimosa or *Albizia julibrissin*. Fast growing and drought tolerant, this plant seems to have a good anchored hold on land areas in our region. At Maclay Gardens State Park, with shiny green leaves and bright red berries, coral ardisa or *Ardisia crenata*, looks to be the culprit that multiplies most triumphantly in our natural

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areas. Other local problem plants include cat's claw vine, Japanese climbing fern, tallow, camphor, podocarpus, hydrilla, wild taro, and kudzu just to name a few.

Methods of removal of these invasive plants range from hand-pulling to cut stump herbicide application. In order to determine what is best for your situation it will take a little research, but that can be enjoyable and a worthwhile study. One of the most recommended publications in use today is "Control of Non-native Plants in Natural Areas of Florida". It is available on the University of Florida IFAS publication website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/WG209>

Removal of these species is the most important step we can take. With more development of land and urban sprawl an ongoing problem, we have the responsibility as land managers and home owners to keep land preservation a top priority.

If you have questions about invasive exotic plants or wish to become a volunteer and help in the fight, please feel free to contact us at the Park 850-487-4115

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