

Be Careful What You Plant



Photo by Marie Harrison, UF-IFAS Okaloosa County Master Gardener

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One of my favorite people is Aunt Gladys, my aunt who lives in Mississippi . I make a special effort to visit her whenever I go back home. When I visit Aunt Gladys, we walk about the garden and talk about the plants. I always know, like gardening buddies automatically know, that I am welcome to a cutting or piece of anything that grows in the yard. One of the plants that I spied on one particular visit was a pretty vine running about the ground. Attractive, dark green, deeply lobed, glossy leaves provided the perfect backdrop for the profusion of bright yellow, daisylike flowers that were blooming at the time. Of course, I had to have a start of it.

For a long time I did not know the identity of the plant. Somewhere along the way, I saw it and learned that its name is *Sphagneticola trilobata* (syn. *Wedelia trilobata*). I enjoyed growing it for several years. Finally, though, after it really took hold in my garden, it began roaming about in places where it was not welcome. I repeatedly trimmed it back and removed it from shrubs and plants that grew in its vicinity. It had become a garden thug, and I was no longer kindly disposed towards it.

Part of its allure, in addition to its handsomeness, is the fact that it grows almost anywhere with very little care. It is adaptable to most soils and grows readily in sun or shade on moist to dry soils. In Zone 8 and in other areas where frosts occur, it may be killed to the ground in winter, but it returns reliably in spring.

Maintenance includes preventing it from growing up into shrubs and trees. Regular trimming along the edges will be necessary to control its spread. Mowing on the highest mower setting may be needed to control height or to rejuvenate the plants. Be especially careful that *Wedelia* does not escape into pasture land or where

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livestock grazes. It has been known to cause farm animals to abort fetuses after they grazed on the plants.

Dumping of garden waste on vacant lots or uninfested areas is a common means of dispersal. Stems can generate new plants where they touch the ground, and cut pieces readily take root. *Wedelia* easily escapes from gardens to roadsides and natural areas where it can outgrow native plants. It develops a thick covering that crowds out or prevents regeneration of other species.

I finally managed to eradicate the pernicious weed by repeated digging. I placed the plants in plastic bags and left them by the compost pile until they were completely decomposed. Control of large areas may be gained by treating with an application of Roundup or other foliar herbicides, followed by additional treatments as needed. Repeated attempts may be necessary for complete eradication.

Wedelia is still sold by area nurseries and touted as a desirable groundcover. They don't know what I know. – or what the FLEPPC (Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council) and other organizations that monitor invasive plants have learned. The Invasive Species Specialist Group headquartered at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, lists it on their list of “100 of the World's Worst Invasive Alien Species.” It shares space on the list with such lovelies as *Mus musculus* (house mouse), *Solenopsis invicta* (red imported fire ant), and *Pueraria montana* (kudzu).

That is enough to cause people who are concerned about the environment to think twice before including *wedelia* in their landscapes. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council lists it as a Category II invasive pest plant. That, to me, smacks of caution. Thanks, Aunt Gladys, for many plants that grace my garden. This one, however, I could have done without.

At a Glance

Sphagneticola trilobata syn. *Wedelia trilobata*

Say: wee-DEE-lee-uh try-lo-BAY-tuh

Family: Asteraceae (Aster/Daisy Family)

Other Names: Trailing Daisy , Singapore Daisy, Creeping Ox-eye, Yellow Dots

Size: 10-14 inches tall, spreading

Native Range : Central America

Zones: 8 - 11

FLEPPC Rank: Category II

Other Lists:

PIER (Pacific Islands Ecosystems at Risk)

List of 100 of the World's Worst Invasive Alien Species (Invasive Species Specialist Group, University of Auckland , New Zealand)

HEAR (Hawaiian Ecosystems at Risk)

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