

## How to be a Good Garden Neighbor

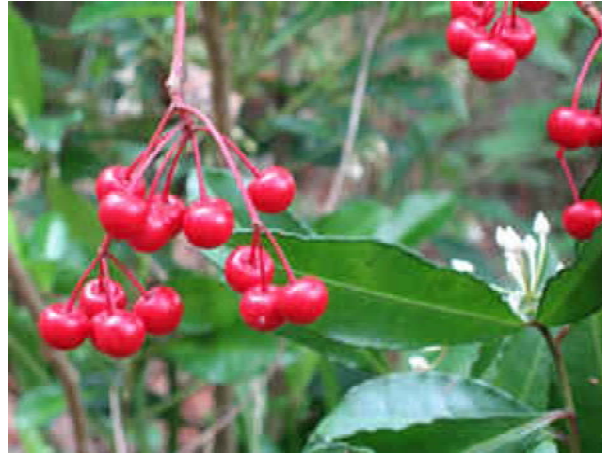


Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*) is one of several plants that can spread invasively into woodland areas. Despite its beautiful berries, white flowers, and glossy green leaves, it shouldn't be planted in landscapes.

Beth Weidner is Park Manager for Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park and an advisory committee member for the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension, <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/>

June 22, 2006

**L**ast weekend, I visited a good friend, and took along some slips of salvia dug up from my yard, knowing that my friend didn't have that particular species. A short and pleasant garden stroll later, I came away with cuttings of a beautiful tall monarda to add to my own garden.

One of the most fun things about gardening is the everyday practice of sharing plants with friends and neighbors. Often, these "pass-along plants" are old varieties that our grandmothers grew, and many come with stories of the people from whom we acquired them. It's a toss-up as to what gardeners prize most, the sentimental attachments or the intrinsic beauty of the plants themselves.

But, in sharing plants across the garden fence, it behooves all of us to be sure that what we're sharing is desirable. There are many plants with beautiful flowers, foliage or berries, that have unfortunate habits of becoming too much of a good thing, and spreading far beyond the boundaries of our own yards.

Plants that are considered to be "invasive" spread in a number of different ways. Many produce seeds that are attractive to birds, and that germinate after passing through the birds' digestive systems. These can be introduced many miles away from where the parent plant is growing, and are the most difficult to control. Some of the worst offenders locally include *Ardisia crenata* (coral-berry or coral ardisia), *Nandina domestica* (heavenly bamboo), *Eleagnus pungens* (Russian olive), and *Sapium sebiferum* (Chinese tallow tree or popcorn tree).

These plants are all listed by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council and should be avoided in our area. Many people especially prize the foliage and berries of these plants, and don't want to eradicate them. But managers of woodland areas, including park managers such as myself, know that they can be devastating to natural habitats. They often create mono-cultures that smother out native plants such as violet, trillium and other spring

## How to be a Good Garden Neighbor

ephemerals. Tallow tree can displace entire forests of native trees, creating a forest wasteland of destroyed diversity.

Other invasive exotic plants spread by underground roots or stolons. These can also cross the garden fence and become unwanted guests in your neighbor's yard. In fact, they're more like permanent squatters than guests, as they can be very difficult to get rid of. A classic example is the "running" types of bamboo, as opposed to the "clumping" types, which are more mannerly. Another plant in this category is *Clerodendron bungeii*, or Cashmere bouquet (and there are other species of *Clerodendron* that fit this category).

Gardeners think of ourselves as being in touch with nature, and indeed the acts of gardening create that connection. To be responsible, we must engage our minds as well as our hands, and think about the larger implications of our actions. Environmentalists don't plant invasive exotics, regardless of how pretty we think the flowers to be!

When sharing plants with friends, or purchasing new plants from a nursery, responsible gardeners should take time to ask about the growth habits of new finds. Reputable nurseries do not sell the worst of the invasive exotics, but it is still helpful to ask how plants increase. There are many desirable exotic plants that are not invasive, that can be grown alongside our native flora, to create a beautiful landscape. Good gardening neighbors take care to know what they're introducing into their own gardens, to insure that they're not sharing unwanted pests across the garden fence.

###