

Bad Plants

Here is an article from the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (EPPC). You can find this & more information at <http://www.fleppc.org/index.cfm>

The EPPC mission is to support the management of invasive exotic plants in Florida's natural areas by providing a forum for the exchange of scientific, educational & technical information. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council is a non-profit organization & is not a regulatory agency.

What is an "invasive exotic plant"?

An *exotic* plant is a plant that has been introduced to an area from outside its native range, either purposefully or accidentally.

A *naturalized exotic* plant is one that can sustain itself outside of cultivation, outside its native range. It is still exotic; it has not "become" native.

An *invasive exotic* plant is a naturalized exotic plant that is expanding its range into natural areas & disrupting naturally occurring native plant communities.

What is a "native plant"?

A Florida *native plant* is one whose natural range included Florida at the time of European contact (1500 AD).

So what if a plant is growing in a new place? Aren't all plants "good"?

All plants make oxygen & absorb carbon dioxide. That's good if you plan on breathing. However, when certain plants are introduced to a new location without the factors like severe seasonal weather, diseases or insect pests that kept them under control in their native range, they can just keep growing & reproducing, out-competing & displacing the native plants & disrupting naturally-balanced native plant communities. This reduction in biodiversity can adversely impact wildlife & alter natural processes such as fire frequency or intensity & water flow.

Are there many exotic plant species growing wild in Florida?

YES! according to the University of South Florida, almost one-third of the plants growing wild in Florida are non-native & some of these have become serious problems.

Is it possible that I've seen invasive exotic plants & didn't even realize it?

YES! Floridians are commonly surrounded by these plants, on our roads, in our backyards & in natural areas.

How do invasive exotic plants spread?

Seeds from invasive exotic plants can be spread by wind (for example microscopic spores from Old World climbing fern), by water (for example, melaleuca trees in the Everglades), or by birds or other wildlife that eat the fruit & deposit the seeds in droppings far from the original tree (for example, Brazilian pepper & carrotwood). Others spread from expanding underground root systems (for example, suckering Australian pine & erect sword fern).

So invasive exotic plants can spread to new places. Why should I care?

Control of exotic plants in Florida's natural areas & waterways is expensive, costing taxpayers millions of dollars to control each year. By getting involved in preventing the introduction & spread of invasive exotic plants, you will be saving yourself money.

Invasive exotic plants continue to degrade our natural areas & impact associated wildlife habitat. Because some of them are aquatic, they also can impede navigation & flood control in our waters.

Wow. I never really thought about all these things before. What can I do to help?

Start at home. Many invasive exotic plants are unknowingly planted & maintained by homeowners as landscaping material. Attractive, hardy, native species and/or non-invasive plants are commercially available at nurseries or garden centers. Identify the plants in your yard, remove the invasive exotics (or at least remove any fruits) & install appropriate native plants instead. & never empty your aquarium into a lake or river.

Contact your local, state or federal government representatives & let them know you are concerned about invasive exotic plant impacts.

Find out about existing programs & volunteer.

Spread the word!