

Osceola County's **SOLUTIONS** *for your LIFE*

July, August, September
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Help Preserve Florida- Don't Release Unwanted Pets, including Plants!

Stacia Hetrick

Did you know that many of the nonnative species that are threatening Florida's environment are a result of people releasing their unwanted pets? Currently there are over 400 non-native, or exotic, fish and wildlife species that call Florida home. Among these are Burmese pythons, Nile monitor lizards, Quaker parrots, and domestic cats. Many pet owners think that they are "doing the right thing" by releasing their pets when they are no longer wanted. But once these pets find their way into Florida's habitats they can pose a significant threat to our wildlife resources. This is one of the reasons that it is illegal to release nonnative plants and animals into Florida's natural areas.



Our lakes and ponds are also being threatened by nonnative species, including plants. It may seem like a harmless act to dump out an aquarium into a pond, but this is exactly how numerous exotic fish and plants were introduced into Florida. One species that causes serious environmental and economic impacts in Osceola County is the aquatic weed hydrilla. After being released by the



aquarium industry in the 1950s it spread throughout Florida and the United States. Even seemingly harmless pet turtles that are released can cause harm to our native turtles.

So what can we do to protect our environment and prevent the release of more nonnative species? We can start by educating others about not releasing pets and choosing pets that we will be able to maintain. If you are no longer able to care for a pet, you can contact local pet stores to see if you can return it or give your pet away at a Pet Amnesty Day (check MyFWC.com for dates). Also, don't dump aquarium plants, fish or snails! Find another home for the animals and put the plants into a bucket with a 10% bleach solution for at least 24 hours, then drain the water and put the plants in the garbage.

For more information, visit <http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu>. While you're there, be sure to complete the "Pet Owner Survey" and take the pledge to help protect Florida's natural areas. If you do, we'll send you a gift!

Become a Master Gardener Volunteer

Jennifer Welshans-Pelham

If you have ever had a problem in your garden or landscape that you couldn't solve, you like gardening and want to learn more about it, are looking to participate in a University of Florida