**Welcome** to Estero Bay Preserve State Park — a place to experience Florida’s rich plant and animal life. While you’re here, we’d like to bring attention to some invasive plant species that are a serious ecological threat within this park and other natural areas throughout the state.

**What Is An Invasive Plant?**
Of the more than 4,000 plant species found in Florida, 1,300 or more are non-native* or exotic; they come from other countries or regions within the U.S. At least 130 of these exotic plants are spreading rapidly throughout our natural areas and private lands. When they cause environmental or economic harm, they are considered to be invasive.

**So, What's The Problem?**
In their native ranges, plants generally do not become a nuisance. Today, with modern transportation, many exotic plants have caught a free ride to Florida. Once they arrive, they are free from natural enemies that existed in their home range (insects, diseases, etc.) and can outgrow and replace Florida’s native plants.

**When Invasive Plants Replace Native Plants:**
- Native plants can be permanently eliminated, diminishing Florida’s natural diversity;
- Animals that use native plants are often unable to adapt, so they leave the area or die out;
- Invasive aquatic plants can completely fill the water column so that fish and wildlife are driven from the area.

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* Florida botanist, Richard Wunderlin, defines non-native plants as “those that have become part of the Florida flora following the occupation by European man.” In other words, if a plant was introduced after 1513, it is considered to be non-native.

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**Why Should We Care?**
Invasive plants are costing Floridians a lot of money; nearly 80 million taxpayer dollars were spent in 2005 to control them. If not kept in check, invasive plants can create ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes, cause serious navigation blockages, and major flooding problems during storms. Boating, swimming, hiking and other uses of natural areas can also be made difficult, even dangerous, by invasive plant infestations.

**Keeping Things Under Control**
After much research, we know that some invasive plant species will never be eradicated in Florida; they simply reproduce too fast. So now, the strategy is to keep infestations at the lowest feasible levels. This helps lessen overall environmental damage; it maintains habitat for native wildlife; and it keeps the plants from damaging bridges and flood control structures. It also reduces the total amount of herbicides needed over the long term.

**Control of invasive plants allows greater enjoyment of our waters and natural areas, and preserves Florida’s natural diversity.**

**Help Us Control Invasive Plants by Keeping Them Out of Your Landscape at Home**
Preventing the introduction and spread of non-native plants in Florida is the most effective and least expensive means of protecting Florida’s natural habitats. Here are a few things we can all do:

- Learn to identify which plants are invasive, especially in your area.
- Volunteer to help remove invasive plants.
- Inspect your yard, woods, garden, or school for invasive plants; throw them in household trash (don’t compost).
- Practice good stewardship: never transport Florida’s plants to other areas and never empty your aquarium into a body of water, even a canal.
- Avoid chopping aquatic plants with boat propellers as some plant fragments can grow into new infestations.
- Remove plant matter from boats/trailers after use; check clothing and shoes for seeds.
- Ask your nursery or garden center for native and/or non-invasive plants.

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Learn more about invasive plants:
[http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/invasplant.html](http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/invasplant.html)

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* Estero, Florida
**[www.floridastateparks.org/EsteroBay](http://www.floridastateparks.org/EsteroBay)**
**(239) 463-3240**
Acacia auriculiformis
Earleaf acacia
was introduced to Florida for ornament before 1932. Used extensively in street landscaping in south Florida for many years, it is now common in disturbed areas. It also has invaded pinelands, scrub, and hammocks, with significant populations in many of the globally imperiled pine rocklands of Miami-Dade County. This exotic is displacing native vegetation and threatening to shade out rare plants in remnant scrub areas.

Lygodium microphyllum
Old World climbing fern is a native to Asia and Australia. It climbs into trees and shades out native vegetation in hundreds of acres in east-central Florida. It can "resprout" from almost anywhere along each climbing leaf—yes, leaf. Dense growth of this fern can be a fire hazard, enabling ground fires to reach into tree canopies where flames can kill the growing branches. This is a perfect example of how invasive exotic plants can change physical processes in plant communities.

Rhodomyrtus tomentosa
Native to Asia, downy rose myrtle is spreading unchecked in Florida, taking over the understory of native pinelands, and likely altering the natural fire regimes of Florida. Introduced as landscaping plants, heavy infestations already occur in several central and southern counties, including Lee, Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade, and as far north as Pasco County. It is also an invasive weed in Hawaii. It continues to be sold through nurseries in Florida.

Casuarina species
Australian pines were introduced to Florida before 1924, and planted widely as windbreaks, roadside trees, and hedges. Vertical sprouts or “ suckers” from widely spreading roots create “ local jungles” of dense branches that displace native plants. Casuarina species have had devastating effects on the native plant communities of Sanibel and Captiva Island. They have also caused millions of dollars in property damage due to their tendency to fall over in high winds.

Melaleuca quinquenervia
Introduced to Florida for ornament in 1906, melaleuca seeds were scattered aerially over the Everglades in the 1930s to create forests. Once touted as “one of Florida’s best landscape trees,” it is now recognized as a threat to the Florida Everglades, a World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve. Melaleuca grows extremely fast and produces millions of seeds, creating dense stands that displace native plants and diminish animal habitat. Mature trees can withstand fire and severe frost.

Schinus terebinthifolius
Brazilian pepper infests both aquatic and terrestrial habitats, greatly reducing the quality of native biotic communities in the state. From South America, it was probably introduced as an ornamental in the mid 1800s. Though this tree is not particularly cold-hardy, it occurs as far north as St. Augustine on the Atlantic coast and Cedar Key on the Gulf coast of Florida.

Identifying Invasive Plants
The non-native plants in this brochure have proven to be invasive in our park and region and are currently being controlled by park staff, contractors and volunteers. Do you recognize any of them? Read on to learn more about these quiet invaders.


Identify plants in your own neighborhood: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/photocat.html