Welcome to Oscar Scherer 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.

* 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.

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 mosquitos, 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.

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.

Learn more about invasive plants:
http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/invasplant.html

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Cupaniopsis anacardiodes
Carrotwood was introduced for landscaping in the 1960s and gained quick popularity in south Florida for its fast growth and ease of propagation. By 1990, seedlings were found on both coasts of the state. It has now been found in natural areas of 14 central and south Florida counties. It has invaded spoil islands, beach dunes, marshes, tropical hammocks, mangrove and cypress swamps and various scrub habitats.

Imperata cylindrica
Cogon grass is considered one of the 10 worst weeds in the world and is reported by 73 countries as a pest in at least 35 crops. Native to warmer regions, it was brought into the U.S. as an experimental forage and as packing material. It is a serious weed of dry lands in Florida, but also occurs in places that become briefly flooded. It can cover large areas and has invaded the habitats of federally listed endangered and threatened native plant species.

Sapium sebiferum
Introduced into the southeastern U.S. from China as early as the 1700s, Chinese tallow has been cultivated for about 1,500 years as a seed-oil crop. It spreads rampantly in large natural areas by out-competing native plants, and can thrive in well-drained uplands as well as in bottomlands, shores of waterbodies, and even on floating islands. It is commonly referred to as “Florida aspen” or “popcorn-tree” and continues to be sold in plant nurseries.

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.

Eugenia uniflora
Surinam cherry is an evergreen, multibranched shrub or small tree that can grow to 30 feet. Introduced for ornament and edible fruit before 1931, it has become widely distributed in central and south Florida. It has spread into Dade and Broward County hammocks in high numbers and is now reported to be in over 20 Florida natural areas. It is a general host for the Mediterranean fruit fly.

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.


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