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

**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 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.

**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.

**Why Should You Know**

Florida wildlife rely on native plants for food and habitat.

**Invasive Plants You Should Know**

Learn about native vs invasive plants: [http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/invasplant.html](http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/invasplant.html)
**Ardisia crenata**
Introduced into Florida for ornament around 1900, *coral ardisia* has become naturalized in hardwood hammocks, including several areas in northern Florida. It can reach densities of 100-plus plants per square meter, reducing the already dim light of forest understories by an additional 70%, and potentially shading out native seedlings and ground cover.

**Colocasia esculenta**
Initially brought from Africa to the Americas as a food crop for slaves, *wild taro* was introduced into Florida and other southern states in 1910 by the USDA as a substitute crop for potatoes. Considered an “aggressive weed” in parts of the Southeast in 1974, it is widely naturalized in Florida along streams, marshy shores, canals, and ditches. It forms dense growth along river and lake shores, displacing native shoreline vegetation.

**Macfadyena unguis-cati**
Cat’s claw vine was introduced for ornament before 1947. Persistent around former habitations in south Florida and naturalized in ten Florida counties throughout the state. Increasingly spreading into natural areas in northern Florida. Has become the dominant ground cover in undisturbed hammocks by Lake George and infests San Felasco Hammock and the University of Florida campus. Also reported as rapidly spreading in four hammock preserves in Dade County. Easily climbs to the tops of tall trees where foot-long seed pods release innumerable winged seeds. Extremely difficult to control the hard tuberous roots and woody stems.

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**Broussonetia papyrifera**
Likely introduced for agricultural and ornamental purposes in the late 1800’s, *paper mulberry* now occurs in at least 16 conservation areas across Florida. An aggressive, suckering, weedy colonizer that commonly forms thickets in moist areas and along streams, it establishes rapidly and crowds out other vegetation. Established around sinkholes and in calcareous hammocks near Gainesville and also found in tropical hardwood hammock, rockland hammock, and sandhill habitats.

**Dioscorea bulbifera**
A vine introduced for ornamental and food plant around 1905, *air potato* was already recognized as a pest plant throughout the state by the early 1970s. This “pretty plant” can quickly grow 60-70 feet — long enough to overtop and shade out tall trees. A member of the yam family, air potato vines produce large numbers of aerial potato-like growths which fall to the ground and grow into new vines. They are reported to be bitter when eaten raw and are not considered edible.

**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.

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