

# Module 1 ~ Silent Invaders (MS/HS)

## Native Plants Reading Activity



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Read the following passage. Answer the questions below after the reading passage in complete sentences.

More than 4,200 plant species are known to live and grow in natural areas in Florida. About 3,000 are what scientists call **native plants**. They are considered **native** because they have been part of Florida's environment for a very long time—perhaps thousands of years. Native plants were not brought to Florida by humans, either on purpose or by accident. Native plants were present in Florida lands and waters before the arrival of the first Europeans, who brought with them many kinds of new, **non-native** species.

Also known as **indigenous** plants, native plants evolved along with the animals and other organisms in their habitat. Native plants perform important ecological functions in these natural systems. They provide food and shelter for wildlife; they stabilize soils in lake bottoms, coastal shorelines, fields and forests; and they are part of a rich **biodiversity** that makes Florida such a beautiful place to live and visit.

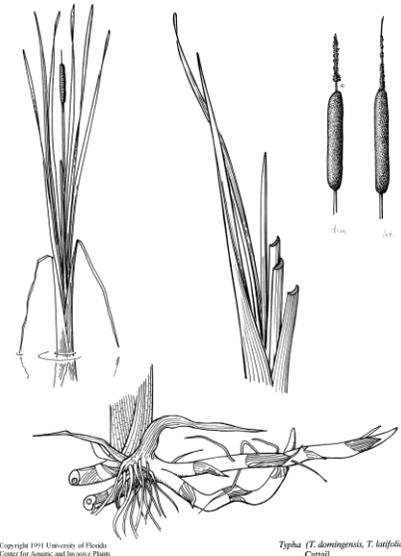
This biodiversity – a great number of species growing together in balance within a particular type of habitat – is possible because each native plant has limits put on its growth by a variety of other parts of the natural system. These limits include:

- competition with other native plants
- native diseases
- **predation** (being consumed) by insects and other animals,
- climate (includes temperature, air and wind, humidity, light, rainfall, etc.)
- natural fluctuations in water levels

A single native plant species rarely **outcompetes** other native species to “take over” an area. However, when a natural area becomes disturbed or when natural water levels are altered, then certain native plants can become “weedy.” For example, our native cat-tails (See Figure 1 above) are famous for quickly reproducing in areas that have been disturbed by construction and other human activities. Many people find cattails to be more pleasant to look at than other native water-loving plant species, and therefore they are often planted on purpose in human-made ponds.

In the Everglades, cat-tails can crowd out saw grass, another native plant that has its own important role to play in the **ecosystem**. Unlike cat-tails, saw grass does not grow well in deeper water. When water levels remain high for an extended period of time, whether due to man-made dams or drainage systems or natural processes, the cat-tails are able to **outcompete** the saw grass.

Human choices impact the number, spread, and survival of plant species, both native and non-native. These choices can be based on how attractive we think a plant is and on science-based considerations such as how hardy and tolerant of weather and soil changes the species is. It's important to note that even though native plants can cause some problems at times, they are not considered **invasive**. Scientists do not always agree on whether a plant is native or non-native. They examine the best historic and scientific information available to determine the answer.



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Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants

*Typha* (*T. domingensis*, *T. latifolia*)  
Cattail



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