



Module 1 ~ Silent Invaders (MS/HS)

Non-Native Plants Reading Activity

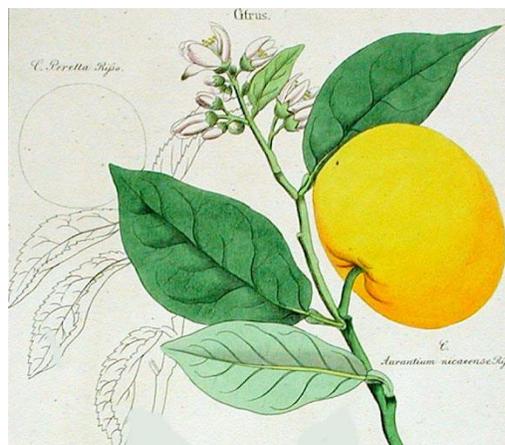
Name: _____ Class Period: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read the passage and use the information you've learned to answer the questions below. Answer questions in complete sentences.

Of the more than 4,200 types of plants in Florida, approximately 1,400 are non-native plants. A plant that can be found growing in Florida, but is native to someplace else is a **non-native plant**. Non-native is often used to describe plants from other countries, but it can also be used to describe plants from another region within a country. In North America, a plant is considered a non-native plant if it became part of our natural landscapes after the arrival of Europeans, based on the best historical and scientific information available.

Non-native plants also are referred to as non-indigenous, alien, or exotic. It's important to remember that just because a plant is non-native or exotic it doesn't mean that it is **invasive** (damaging to the environment or human economy). A wide variety of non-native agricultural plants (tomatoes, citrus trees), horticultural plants (roses, coconut palm trees) and other economic crops are helpful to human health and our economy. These plants are well managed by the growers who plant them and sell their valuable products. As far as we know, there are no forests being threatened by tomato plants!

Citrus trees are a prime example of a non-indigenous plant species that grows well in Florida, but is not invasive. Since Ponce de Leon brought the first Asian citrus trees to Florida in the 1500s, citrus fruit growing has become a billion-dollar industry in Florida. A few citrus trees do grow wild in natural areas (outside of people's back yards and farmers' groves). However these trees do not establish in abundance when left to grow with no human intervention.



Citrus trees are non-native to Florida.

Non-native plant species are accidentally brought into Florida all the time from other parts of the state, the country and from other countries. It happens in a number of ways:

- Plants can be “escapees” from off-road vehicles, cargo on airplanes or in ballast water from ships;
- They can be mixed in with fruits, vegetables or flowers brought home in vacation or travel luggage;
- They can be ‘hitchhikers’ on boat trailers, props, in bait wells or in potted plants brought home from the store or a relative’s house.
- They can be a mistakenly-identified or unknown plants from a friend or garden center.

In the past, some plant species were purposefully brought in to try to improve our natural areas. For example, melaleuca trees (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) were brought to Florida from Australia and their seeds were spread from airplanes over the Everglades. At the time, land managers wanted the trees to absorb water to make the Everglades more useful for humans. Unfortunately, these non-native melaleuca trees quickly became invasive



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4. What examples can you find to explain the introduction of non-native plant species to Florida on a daily basis from other parts of the state, country and other continents?

5. Why must we practice caution when introducing non-native plants to “improve” our natural areas?

Sources:

UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Plant Management in Florida Waters: An Integrated Approach: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/manage/>

Smithsonian Marine Station at Fort Pierce: Non-native and Invasive Species: <http://www.sms.si.edu/irlspec/Nonnatives.htm>

EDIS: Native Plants: An Overview: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep297>



Florida Invasive Plant Education Initiative • <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/education>
A Collaboration of the UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants
and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission / Invasive Plant Management Section

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