

Welcome to Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center 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 plants 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 from other regions within the U.S. At least 130 of these exotic plant species are spreading rapidly throughout our natural areas. When they cause environmental or economic harm, they are considered to be **invasive**.

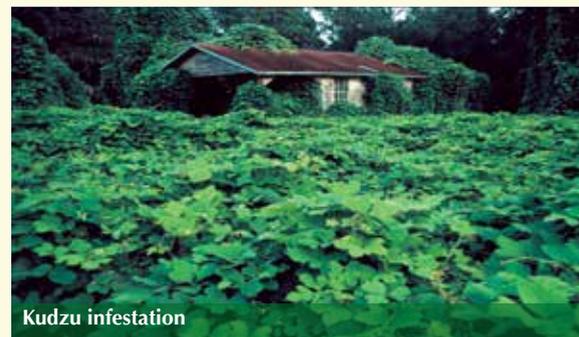
So, What's The Problem?

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 here, they are free from natural enemies that existed in their home range (animals that eat them, plant diseases, etc.), and can outgrow and replace Florida's native plants.

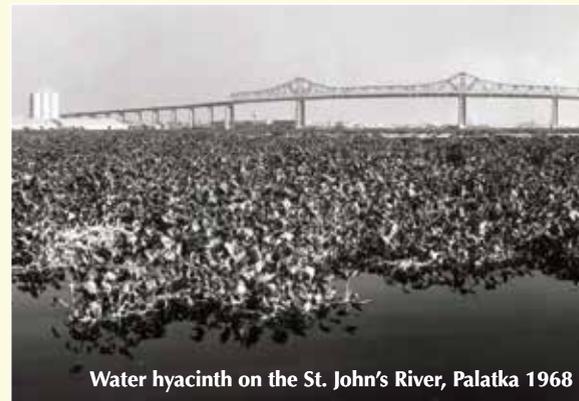
When Invasive Plants Replace Native Plants:

- Native plants can be permanently eliminated, diminishing Florida's natural diversity;
- Animals that rely on native plants are often unable to adapt, so they may leave the area or die out;
- Invasive aquatic plants can completely fill and/or cover the water, damaging habitat and diversity.

* The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council defines an exotic (non-native) species as one introduced to Florida, purposefully or accidentally, from a natural range outside of Florida. A naturalized exotic is one that is self-sustaining outside of cultivation.



Kudzu infestation



Water hyacinth on the St. John's River, Palatka 1968

Why Should We Care?

Invasive plants cost Floridians a lot of money; millions of taxpayer dollars are spent each year to control them. If not kept in check, invasive plants can replace Florida's native plants (some of them endangered or threatened), be toxic to wildlife and/or people, increase the severity of wildfires, and alter ecosystems. Because some of them are aquatic, they can also cause problems with irrigation, navigation and flood control. 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. That is why we strive to keep them at the lowest possible levels. Regular maintenance of invasive plants reduces overall environmental and economic damage and maintains habitat for native plants and animals.

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



Help Control Invasive Plants by Keeping Them Out of Your Landscape at Home

Preventing the introduction and spread of invasive 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:

- Volunteer to help remove invasive plants in your area.
- Support community efforts to ban invasive plants from newly developed landscaping.
- Ask your nursery or garden center for native and/or non-invasive plants when landscaping.
- Don't move invasive plants to other areas and never empty your aquarium into a body of water, not even a canal.
- Avoid chopping aquatic plants with boat propellers as some plant fragments can grow into even more plants.
- Check clothing, shoes, and pets for seeds after hiking and remove them.
- Remove plant fragments from boats/trailers after use;
- Watch for and report invasive plants found in this park; note the location and tell a ranger.
- Take guided walks at state parks to learn about Florida's native plants and animals.



Park staff controlling an air potato infestation

Learn more about invasive plants:

University of Florida/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants
plants.ifas.ufl.edu

Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council
www.fleppc.org

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/invasive-plants



December 2016



Invasive Plants You Should Know



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State Park*

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www.floridastateparks.org/park/Stephen-Foster

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.

Ardisia crenata

Introduced into Florida for ornament around 1900, **coral ardisia** has become naturalized in hardwood hammocks, including several areas in central and northern Florida. It can reach densities of greater than 100 plants per square meter, reducing the already dim light of forest understories by an additional 70%, and displacing native seedlings and ground cover. It produces seeds, which germinate in high numbers around parent plants and appear also to be spread longer distances by birds and mammals. **P**

Albizia julibrissin

Originally from China, **mimosa** or **silk tree** was introduced in 1745 and cultivated for use as an ornamental. It is a strong competitor in open areas and forest edges due to its ability to grow in various soil types, its prolific seed production, and its ability to re-sprout after being cut back or damaged. Often found along roadsides, waterways and disturbed areas, it reduces the sunlight and nutrients available to native species.

Wisteria sinense

Introduced from Japan and China in the 1800s as an ornamental vine, **Chinese wisteria** is found from Maine to Florida. It is a woody, twining vine that will grow over virtually anything in its path, enabling it to climb high into tree canopies, shading out and girdling native plants, and killing even large trees. It reproduces by seeds and by rooting at each node, and will produce new shoots if cut back or trimmed.

Plant descriptions excerpted from Identification & Biology of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas by K. A. Langeland, H. M. Cherry, C. M. McCormick, and K. A. Craddock Burks, Second Edition, 2008. University of Florida-IFAS.



P
Ardisia crenata
coral ardisia - low shrub; dark green, waxy leaves, scalloped margins; bright red berries



Albizia julibrissin
mimosa - to 15 m; showy pink flowers



Wisteria sinense
Chinese wisteria - high climbing vine with fragrant flowers

P = This plant is prohibited by federal or state law.



Cinnamomum camphora
camphor tree - to 20 m; camphor aroma; fruits turn black



Melia azederach
Chinaberry - tree to 15m; purplish bark; leaves alternate and 2 or 3 times compound; flowers small with 5 petals



P
Lygodium japonicum
Japanese climbing fern - multi-lobed leaflets; fertile leaflets have two rows of sporangia along margins

Cinnamomum camphora

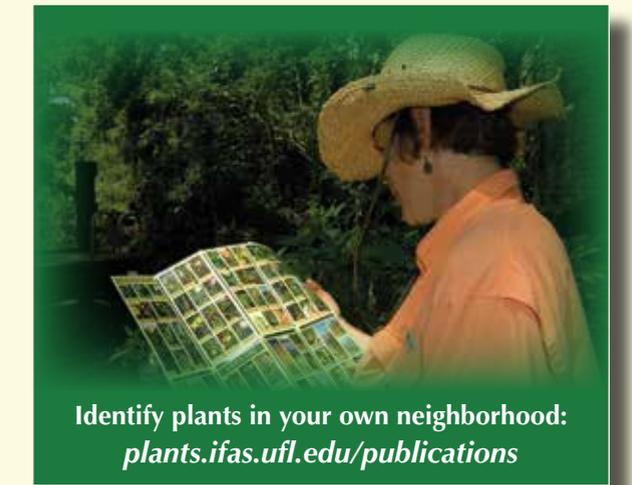
Native to China and Japan, **camphor tree** was introduced into Florida in 1875 and grown in plantations for camphor production. It produces large amounts of seeds, which are eaten and spread widely by birds. It is a common invasive tree in disturbed areas and along fencerows where birds perch. It invades scrub and sandhill communities, hardwood hammocks, mesic flatwoods, floodplain forests, and lake, stream, and spring shorelines, rapidly displacing native plants due to its fast growth habit.

Melia azederach

Native to Asia, **Chinaberry** was introduced to southern states in 1830 as an ornamental tree. It can grow up to 50 feet tall. It is most abundant in north and west Florida. It is able to spread by seed and vegetative reproduction, quickly displacing native plants. Its fruit is poisonous to humans and other mammals. Chinaberry flowers are fragrant and lilac-like and are produced in spring.

Lygodium japonicum

Native to eastern Asia, **Japanese climbing fern** can overtop forest trees, shading out and even killing them. It often grows as a tangled mass over shrubs and fencelines, smothering ground cover and tree seedlings in the southeastern U.S. It thrives in damp places. While its leaflets are killed by winter frost, the plant persists from year to year. Like other ferns, its reproductive spores can be carried long distances by wind, vehicles, and even clothing and shoes. **P**



Identify plants in your own neighborhood:
plants.ifas.ufl.edu/publications