Sometimes, there can be too much of a good thing. Too much pumpkin pie, too much turkey leftovers or too many seedlings in the garden. Invasive plants are a variation on too much of a good thing.

Invasive plants are weeds, plants that don't want to stay where you put them. They spread easily and move into other areas. Many have attractive characteristics, but they easily overwhelm the landscape—too much of a good thing. Have you ever pulled golden rain tree seedlings from your flower beds? Ever had camphor tree sprouts rise above your shrubbery? Pulled air potato vines out of the trees? Dug St. Augustine grass away from the driveway? These are all invasive plants.

Some invasive plants are not native to our area. We call them exotic invasives. Many of them were brought over from other countries for landscaping. Examples include Brazilian pepper, Chinese tallow or popcorn tree and Boston fern, commonly called sword fern.

Brazilian pepper grows as a large sprawling shrub. Locals often refer to it as "Florida holly" though it is not a true holly. The red berries have been used as holiday decorations for over a century. The leaves are odd pinnately compound (leaflets attached along a central stalk in a feather-like arrangement with one at the end) with 7 to 9 leaflets. The leaves have a strong smell when crushed.

Unfortunately, birds like the berries and deposit seeds throughout the neighborhood. This plant is often found under power lines and along fences where birds settle and digest their dinner.

You may have seen the grove of Chinese tallows growing along the Oak Street extension south of highway 192 in Kissimmee. It is often mis-identified as red maple when drivers see the red colored leaves that have begun to turn as a result of the recent cool weather. Their popcorn like seed pods are opening and shedding seeds now.

While these and other exotic invasive plants are attractive in the landscape, they are a major problem to land managers who are trying to maintain species diversity for wildlife habitat. When these plants become prolific in natural areas such as public parks, wildlife preserves, management areas and ranches, they frequently out-compete and replace native plants. The resulting mono-culture is less diverse and often supports fewer numbers on insects, birds and wildlife. Reduced plant diversity translates into reduced wildlife habitat quality. Invasive plants also alter fire and water movement across the big landscape.

Chemical and mechanic control of these weedy plants is expensive. We spent $20 million on melaleuca (paper bark) control in natural areas in the last decade. Nearly that much is required each year to control hydrilla, an aquatic exotic invasive plant in our local lakes. See: Control of Non-native Plants in Natural Areas of Florida

Since 1970, federal and state laws were passed to prevent the spread of weeds and to protect our natural ecosystems, agriculture, navigation and economy. There are quite a few plants that are now illegal to cultivate in Florida. A few examples include maleleuca (Australian paper bark), Brazilian pepper, Australian pine, Chinese tallow, air potato, cogon grass, and tropical soda apple. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FEPPC) has published an extensive list of plants that have been known to be problematic in natural areas.

Since 1970, federal and state laws were passed to prevent the spread of weeds and to protect our natural ecosystems, agriculture, navigation and economy. There are quite a few plants that are now illegal to cultivate in Florida. A few examples include maleleuca (Australian paper bark), Brazilian pepper, Australian pine, Chinese tallow, air potato, cogon grass, and tropical soda apple. The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FEPPC) has published an extensive list of plants that have been known to be problematic in natural areas.

Private land owners and public land managers must become familiar with invasive plants and their recommended control measures. New home developers should be sure that these plants are removed from their property during the site preparation phase.

Home gardeners can help wildlife and natural areas land managers by careful consideration of the plants
used in landscaping. Consider removing invasive plants from your yard and replacing them with suitable substitute plants. There are true hollies that are well adapted to our growing conditions and produce an abundance of berries for decorating and wildlife food without the nuisance feature of re-seeding where you don't want them. Consider 'East Palatka', 'Nellie R. Stevens' or 'Savannah' holly as alternatives to Brazilian pepper.

Consult University of Florida's Circular 1204 for more information on invasive exotic plants. Request a copy by calling (321) 697-3000 or go to pests and diseases section on the Master Gardeners Links web page at Links.

Dr. Ken Langeland and K. Craddock Burks, published color photos and descriptions of more than 60 plants in Identification and Biology of Non-native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. It is available for sale for $16 plus tax and shipping from the IFAS bookstore at 1-800-226-1764 or online at http://ifasbooks.ufl.edu

---

**Home Landscaping Workshop**

Learn about proper plant selection and low maintenance Florida landscapes Tuesday, Nov. 27, 6:30 - 8:30 PM. The Home Landscaping Workshop will be taught at the Extension Service Office, 1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane, OHP. Call (321) 697-3000 to pre-register.

Eleanor Foerste  
Natural Resources Agent  
Osceola County Extension/University of Florida  
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane  
Kissimmee, FL 34744  
(321) 697-3000  
Fax (321) 697-3010  
efoe@osceola.org  
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu  
Date: November 21st, 2001