



Plants to Avoid Using in Your Landscape

Invasive exotic pest plants have been identified as being destructive to Florida's ecosystems and therefore are undesirable as garden plants in central Florida. They disrupt naturally balanced native plant communities, interfering with fire and water flow, eroding the soil, and reducing fish and wildlife populations. The invasive pest plants listed below are commonly seen in landscapes in Pinellas County, having once been sold commercially or having escaped cultivation. Do not plant any of these species, and if they are already in your landscape, remove them as soon as possible. ([P] indicates that a plant is prohibited by the Fla. Dept. of Environmental Protection. [N] indicates that a plant is deemed a noxious weed, either by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture or the Fla. Dept. of Agriculture.)

Asparagus fern (*Asparagus densiflorus*) This dense, spiny groundcover can be difficult to eradicate completely. Replace it with a selection of Florida native ferns, like Virginia chain fern (*Woodwardia virginica*), royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*), or bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

Australian pine (*Casuarina* spp.) is not a true pine. It grows rapidly from seeds or root suckers. The leaf litter chokes out most plants under these tall, dense trees. Red cedar (*Juniperus* spp.) and sand pine (*Pinus clausa*) are good substitutes for residential landscapes. [P]

Beach naupaka (*Scaevola sericia*) Once used for coastal plantings, it is now recognized as aggressive and difficult to maintain. Abundant seedlings outcompete native species in mangrove and beach areas. Instead, choose the native inkberry (*Scaevola plumieri*) with smaller, dark green leaves, and black fruit.

Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) The state of Florida has spent tens of millions of dollars trying to eradicate this plant, erroneously called "Florida holly," yet some people still have them in their yards. Birds spread the berries into natural areas, reinfesting areas that have been cleared of them. [P, N]

Camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*) Spread by birds, these large trees have aggressive root systems that can be problematic. Good native shade trees for central Florida include sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*) and live oak (*Quercus virginiana*).

Carrotwood (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*) fruits heavily and birds spread seeds to many different sites. A common dooryard tree, it is invading coastal systems as well as endangered Florida scrub habitat. [N]

Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*) is also spread by bird-dispersed seeds. A native of Asia introduced in the mid-1800s, it is a pest through the southeastern United States.

Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) has become a pest in Georgia and north Florida and has little ornamental value. A variegated form tends to revert to green and its seeds are spread by wildlife. Florida privet (*Forestiera segregata*), walter's viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*) and yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) are good substitutes.

Chinese tallow tree (*Sapium sebiferum*) invades stream banks, riverbanks, and wet areas like ditches, as well as upland sites. It has the potential to be a problem as severe as melaleuca in south Florida. [N]

Guava, strawberry guava (*Psidium* spp.) are grown for their fruit, but large numbers of seedlings are now appearing in pine flatwoods in central and south Florida.

Java Plum (*Syzygium cumini*) is an aggressive tree with abundant messy fruits. Seeds germinate to form heavy thickets. Good native substitutes are soapberry (*Sapindus saponaria*) or red mulberry (*Morus rubra*). The latter is especially attractive to birds.

Lantana (*Lantana camara*) This exotic species is crowding out native lantana species and hybridizing with them. If you feel you must plant it, choose one of the sterile hybrids now being cultivated.

Lofty and laurel figs (*Ficus altissima* and *F. microcarpa*) These aggressive Asian banyan trees until recently did not produce viable seeds, but are now being pollinated by a specialized wasp. Not only do they spread into natural areas, their aggressive root systems can damage walls and building foundations.

Melaleuca/punk tree (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) invades low-lying areas and forms dense thickets, crowding out other species. It continues to be a major problem in south Florida, where millions are spent each year in an attempt to eradicate it. [P, N]

Nandina/heavenly bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) This ornamental shrub can become problematic in shady hammocks and forested areas, where its berries are spread by birds. Shade-tolerant native shrubs to replace nandina include beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*) and rouge plant (*Rivina humilis*). All of these have berries that birds like.

Oyster plant (*Tradescantia spathacea*) Its colorful purple and green leaves have made it a popular landscape plant, but it spreads aggressively, crowds out native species and has no wildlife value. Instead, choose native spider lilies (*Hymenocallis* spp.) or dwarf Fakahatchee grass (*Tripsicum dactyloides*).

Schefflera (*Schefflera actinophylla*) Often used as a house plant, it produces huge numbers of tiny seeds when planted outdoors. It is invading scrub habitat, one of the most endangered habitats in Florida. If you feel you must plant it, choose one of the sterile hybrids now being cultivated. Marlberry (*Ardisia escalloniodes*) and Jamaica caper (*Capparis cynophallophora*) are good native substitutes.

Winged yam/air potato (*Dioscorea* spp.) Once established, these invasive vines are almost impossible to eradicate, requiring manual removal of bulblets and repeated herbicide applications. They have been likened to kudzu for their ability to overwhelm native vegetation, covering trees and shrubs. [N]

For a complete list of invasive exotic pest plants, visit the website of the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, www.fleppc.org.