

Invasive plants and California gardens

All over California, natural areas and parks are under attack by invasive plants. As the population of the state increases, we lose natural habitats that can support native wildlife and plants. When non-native plants invade the precious remaining habitats, the ecosystems are disrupted and degraded because these plants push out the native plants that provide useful shelter, nest sites, and food for native birds, mammals, and other creatures.



Thousands of species of landscape ornamentals are used in California. Only a small percentage has become invasive pest plants in the wild. But, these species constitute over half of the worst invasive plants in the state. Brazilian peppertree (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), shown above, is a problem in wetland habitats in southern California. It is important that gardeners recognize this problem and make informed choices when selecting landscape

ornamentals to help preserve California's natural beauty.

California is very diverse ecologically. Just because a garden plant is invasive in one area of the state does not mean it will be a problem in all areas of California. Myoporum (*Myoporum laetum*), shown below in an estuary in San Diego County, is invasive along much of the California



coastline. However, it is not likely to be a problem when used as a landscape plant in the desert or other inland areas of California.

In the **northeast interior** areas of California, the following are examples of plants that should not be used for landscaping, because they are known to be invasive in the region. Consult your local nursery professional, UC Master Gardener, or an advisor with the University of California Cooperative Extension Office for other plants with similar characteristics that are not invasive. To protect California's beautiful natural habitats, choose garden plants wisely in order to **KEEP IT IN THE GARDEN**.

SCOTCH BROOM

Cytisus scoparius



Scotch broom is a perennial shrub that has been planted throughout California as an ornamental and for erosion control for over 150 years. It is easy to recognize from the bright yellow pea-like flowers, which unfortunately produce large numbers of fertile seed that help spread the plant around the state. Related plants with similar flowers are also non-natives, such as French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*), and gorse (*Ulex europaea*). This broom has invaded over 700,000 acres of forest and other habitat in northern California.

Because Scotch broom is a legume it has nitrogen-fixing bacteria associated with its roots, which means that it provides its own soil fertilizer. This self-fertilizing ability makes this plant very competitive against the native shrubs, few of which are legumes. Legumes also tend to make the soil more acidic, which further suppresses natives.

RUSSIAN OLIVE
Eleagnus angustifolia



Photo courtesy of John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy

Russian olive is a small deciduous tree that has been in cultivation for about 100 years in the western US. It is native to Asia and is grown for its yellow flowers, as windbreaks, for soil stabilization, and as wildlife habitat. The seed, however, are readily consumed by a variety of birds, which spreads the seed long distances. Today, Russian olive is an invasive weed along streams and rivers in most western states.

Russian olive tolerates saline or alkaline soils, flooding, drought, temperatures up to 115 and down to -50⁰ F, and any kind of soil. This degree of environmental tolerance, the very features that make it so easy to grow in the home landscape, also make it very competitive against the native trees and shrubs.

For more information on the subject of invasive plants, we suggest the following websites:

- ✦ wric.ucdavis.edu – the site for the University of California Davis Weed Research and Information Center
- ✦ caleppc.org – the site for the California Exotic Pest Plant Council
- ✦ invasivespecies.gov – the gateway site for the federal government invasive species programs

The authors of this brochure are Carl E. Bell, Regional Advisor- Invasive Plants, Cheryl A. Wilen, Area Integrated Pest Management Advisor, and Vincent F. Lazaneo, Home Horticulture Advisor, Cooperative Extension, San Diego, CA. It is being made available by the Master Gardener Program.

Funding for this brochure was provided by a grant from the US Department of Agriculture Rural Resources Extension Act. This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under special project Section 3(d), Integrated Pest Management.

The University of California prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any person employed by or seeking employment with the University on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran (special disabled veteran, Viet nam-era veteran or any other veteran who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized). University Policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Staff Personnel Services Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607-5200 (510) 987-0096.

**KEEP IT IN THE
GARDEN:
PROTECT CALIFORNIA'S
NATURAL HABITATS**



DEVELOPED FOR THE
NORTHEAST INTERIOR REGION
OF CALIFORNIA



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA
COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION
AND THE MASTER
GARDENER'S OF
CALIFORNIA