

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 **north coastal** 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.**

Pampasgrass Cortaderia selloana

Pampasgrass has been in California for more than 150 years and is planted extensively throughout the state. It is invading many areas of coastal habitat and along rivers and creeks. A close relative, jubatagrass, *Cortaderia jubata*, is invasive along the coast up to Oregon.



Pampasgrass aggressively invades wet areas along the coast, crowding out the native plants. In addition to being competitive with native plants, it also is a fire hazard. Pampasgrass burns more readily and recovers more easily after a fire than the native plants. These fires become a threat to public safety, and also helps expand the territory of pampasgrass.

ENGLISH IVY

Hedera helix



Photo courtesy of John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy

English ivy is a fast growing, aggressive perennial vine that is planted throughout California as a ground cover and on walls. Unfortunately, these same horticultural characteristics allows it to easily invade forests from Santa Cruz into Oregon.

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 has invaded over 700,000 acres of forest and other habitat in northern California.

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.

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OF CALIFORNIA



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