

4-24-2019



Be a Plant Hero! Avoid Invasive Plant Introductions When You Landscape
by Susan Burnside
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

When spring begins, many of us feel the rush to start our home landscaping projects. Nurseries are full of beautiful plants, and the huge selections can make picking the perfect plants overwhelming. There are so many factors to consider — foliage color, plant size, shade or sun — but one of the most important things we should keep in mind when selecting landscaping plants is whether a plant is considered invasive.

Aside from reducing livestock forage, invasive plants can jeopardize animal and human health, increase the threat of fire or flooding, interfere with recreational activities, and decrease land value.

For most of us in this county, Yellow starthistle comes to mind when we hear “invasive plant.” Yellow starthistle, *Centaurea solstitialis*, is native to Eurasia and was likely introduced to California accidentally as a contaminant of alfalfa seed from Europe, Asia and South America in the late 1800s. According to UC Davis, recent reports indicate that Yellow starthistle now infests between 10 and 15 million acres in California.

However, sometimes we forget that a large number of invasive species in California were intentionally introduced over the years as landscape plants. According to the California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC), a majority of the invasive species on their inventory were used, with the best of intentions, as landscape, pond or indoor ornamentals, aquarium plants, soil stabilization species, animal forage species, or human food, fiber or medicinal plants.

4-24-2019

Fortunately, many invasive species that are widespread in California and were introduced through the nursery industry are no longer being sold or are rarely for sale. These include bridal broom (*Retama monosperma*), capeweed (*Arctotheca calendula*), crystalline iceplant (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*), giant reed (*Arundo donax*), jubatagrass (*Cortadaria jubata*), myoporum (*Myoporum laetum*), red sesbania (*Sesbania punicea*), Russian-olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*), saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*), Tasmanian blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), Portuguese broom (*Cytisus striatus*), and Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*).

So what can you do to help prevent the spread of an invasive plant species? Check the Cal-IPC Inventory (cal-ipc.org) before you purchase landscape plants for your yard. The California Invasive Plant Inventory is a comprehensive list of plants based on ecological impacts, as well as “Watch” plants that may become invasive in the future. The Inventory categorizes plants as High, Moderate, or Limited, reflecting the level of each species’ negative ecological impact in California. Species on the “Watch” list have been deemed to pose a high risk of becoming invasive in the future in California. Some of the most helpful features of the Inventory are the ability to view color photos of each plant on the list, detailed plant profiles, and notes on how to manage the plants. You will also find plant recommendations that are alternative to invasive plants.

Another helpful site is PlantRight.org. This site also lists invasive plants to avoid and includes alternative plants for you to consider. For example, instead of planting Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), PlantRight.org suggests five other options, including Forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*) and Flannel bush (*Fremontodendron californicum*). Both organizations also work with nursery and landscape trade organizations to develop voluntary industry measures to keep invasive species out of local landscapes.

On Saturday, April 27, 2019, Master Gardener Pam Lane will present the art of composting in “Backyard Composting Basics.” This free class is from 9 a.m. to noon at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Dr. in Placerville.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at [311 Fair Lane in Placerville](http://311FairLaneinPlacerville). We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.