

# Common Invasive, Exotic Plant Species of Leon County Waterbodies and Wetlands

Invasive, exotic plant species are those plants that invade natural areas that are from somewhere other than Florida, the Southeast, or North America. These plants are undesirable in Leon County's natural areas because they displace native plants and associated wildlife, including endangered species, and can alter natural processes such as fire and water flow <sup>1</sup>. In their natural habitat, predators and competition with other plant species keep them in check. When introduced here, either by accident or purposely, the checks and balances that keep them under control in their native habitat are no longer present and they begin to take over. Many of these plants have become widespread in Florida and Leon County. Approximately 30% of Florida's 4,255 plant species are non-native <sup>2</sup>. A 2011 survey of public lakes and rivers found that 96% contain invasive, exotic plants <sup>3</sup>. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FFWCC) Invasive Plant Management Section spent over \$25 million in the 2010-2011 budget year to control upland and aquatic invasive plants, which is the largest invasive plant management program of its kind in the United States <sup>3,4</sup>.

So, what can we do to help slow the invasion of exotic plant species? The first thing we can do is to learn to identify the invasive, exotic plants that occur in our backyards and local waterways. Once we know what we're dealing with, we can take steps to prevent the spread of these invaders.

## Steps to prevent the spread of invasive, exotic species:

- Do not purchase or plant any invasive, exotic species.
- Remove any existing invasive, exotic species from our own backyards.
- Educate friends and family and help them remove the invaders from their yards.
- Check boat trailers for invasive, exotic hitchhikers and properly dispose of them.

Many of the worst invasive, exotic species are prohibited from being sold at local nurseries but some roadside stands will still sell you a prohibited invader.

Removing invasive, exotic species isn't easy and may take many attempts to completely rid your yard of them. The local County Extension Office can help you determine the best way to eradicate specific invasive, exotic species.

Many aquatic invasive, exotic species hitchhike on boat trailers and can be spread from waterbody to waterbody. When leaving the ramp, check your trailer for any hitchhikers and throw them in the trash can (not back in the water!).



## Identification of Common Invasive, Exotic Plant Species in Leon County Waterbodies and Wetlands

Scientific Name: *Ardisia crenata*

Common Name: Coral Ardisia or Scratchthroat

Habitat: Uplands, Floodplains

Characteristics: Showy fruits; thick, glossy leaves



Scientific Name: *Colocasia esculenta*

Common Name: Wild Taro

Habitat: Wetlands, Lake shores, streambanks

Characteristics: Large arrowhead shaped leaves



Scientific Name: *Eichhornia crassipes*

Common Name: Water Hyacinth

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, streams

Characteristics: Showy flower; floats; forms dense mats



Scientific Name: *Hydrilla verticillata*

Common Name: Hydrilla

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, streams

Characteristics: Dense ribbons of whorled, toothed leaves; mostly under water



Scientific Name: *Ligustrum lucidum*

Common Name: Glossy Privet

Habitat: Uplands

Characteristics: Dark green, glossy leaves; showy, fragrant flowers; purple/black fruits



Scientific Name: *Ligustrum sinense*

Common Name: Chinese Privet

Habitat: Uplands, floodplains

Characteristics: Similar flower and fruit as glossy privet but with smaller, duller leaves





Scientific Name: *Lygodium japonicum*

Common Name: Japanese Climbing Fern

Habitat: Uplands

Characteristics: Viny fern



Scientific Name: *Nandina domestica*

Common Name: Heavenly Bamboo

Habitat: Uplands

Characteristics: Showy flowers and fruits, glossy, divided leaves



Scientific Name: *Panicum repens*

Common Name: Torpedo Grass

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, streams, wetlands

Characteristics: Light green leaves; spreads from shore over water; strong, pointed root leaders



Scientific Name: *Sapium sebiferum*

Common Name: Tallow Tree or Popcorn Tree

Habitat: Uplands, floodplains, lake shores

Characteristics: Showy fall foliage; tear-drop shaped leaf; white fruit



Leon County Public Works – Engineering Services

Scientific Name: *Alternanthera philoxeroides*

Common Name: Alligator Weed

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, streams

Characteristics: Fleshy, round stem; white, papery flower head



For more information on invasive, exotic plants, see the following links:

Leon County Cooperative Extension - <https://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants -  
<https://www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/>

FFWCC's Invasive Plant Management Section -  
<https://www.myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/invasive-plants>

University of Florida's Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants -  
<https://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>

Florida Native Plant Society - <https://www.fnps.org>

Florida Invasive Species Partnership -  
<https://www.floridainvasives.org/>

#### References:

1. Langeland, K.A. 1998. Help Protect Florida's Natural Areas from Non-Native Invasive Plants. Circular 1204. University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Gainesville, Florida.
2. Wunderlin, Richard P., Hansen, Bruce F. 2011. Guide to the Vascular Plants of Florida, Third Edition. University Press of Florida. Gainesville, Florida.
3. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2011. Annual Report of Activities Conducted under the Cooperative Aquatic Plant Control Program in Florida Public Waters for Fiscal Year 2010-2011. Tallahassee, Florida.
4. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2011. Upland Invasive Exotic Plant Control Projects Fiscal Year 2010-2011. Tallahassee, Florida

