

**Friday's Feature**

**By**

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February 22, 2009

### **Spread the word, not the weeds**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week is February 22-27, 2009. This week long awareness campaign is intended to focus national attention on the impacts caused by invasive plant species.

Throughout both urban and rural areas, invasive, non-native plants pose numerous threats to the Florida landscape, especially on public lands such as parks and state natural areas. Invasive plant species overrun a variety of habitats, displace native plant populations, disrupt plant/animal associations, deprive wildlife of needed food sources, significantly reduce plant and wildlife diversity, jeopardize rare and endangered plants and animals, support nonnative pathogens and pests, and can alter ecosystem processes such as fire frequency/intensity, water and nutrient availability, soil chemistry and erosion. In addition, invasive plant species have a significant negative impact on agriculture and forestry.

Across the nation, the most significant invasive weeds are spreading at approximately 15% per year. This rate of spread will result in a doubling of infested acres in less than five years. According to a recent Cornell University report, the economic impact of invasive plants and weeds in the U.S. is estimated at \$34.7 billion annually.

Education is the key in the fight against invasive plants. We must educate citizens at the local level so they understand the impacts invasive plants have on our native ecosystems, even the impacts to our economy. Throughout Invasive Weed Awareness Week, take some time to look around and see which invasive plants are growing in your area.

We encourage you to learn how to identify these Florida invasive plants so that you can help stop their spread:

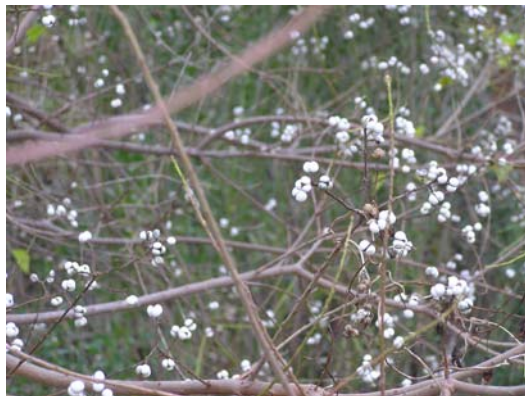
- *Chinese tallow tree*: The Chinese tallow, a.k.a. popcorn tree, was introduced from China in the early 1900s and has since invaded most of the southeastern states. It is a small tree whose seeds are widely dispersed by birds and water runoff. The tree's attractive, light green, heart-shaped leaves that yield bright yellow and red fall colors have made it a popular ornamental. However, this tree is threatening to become the prominent component of marshes, river margins, and dry uplands within its expanding range. Further planting of this tree is prohibited by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and

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it is listed as a noxious weed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Exotic Pest Plant Council.

- *Hydrilla*: Hydrilla spreads when fragments are transported from one water body to another, usually by boats and their trailers. It grows quickly to form dense mats that shade out and replace native plants.
- *Cogongrass*: This is a perennial grass that grows 3 to 10 feet tall and forms dense monocultures. Cogongrass is extremely aggressive and often grows so thick it prevents other plants from growing. The rhizomes can grow 4 feet deep into the ground which makes this plant very difficult to control.
- *Air Potato*: Air potato is a vine that produces 'potatoes in the air'. This invasive vine from Africa was introduced into Florida in 1905. Aside from kudzu, it is the most aggressive invasive vine in Florida. It quickly grows to 60-70 feet in length, high enough to overtop and shade out native trees. The air potato is a member of the yam family and produces many aerial tubers (potato-like growths), which eventually fall off and grow into new plants.
- *Japanese Climbing Fern*: Japanese climbing fern can grow in sun or shade, damp, disturbed or undisturbed areas. It can grow so dense that it forms a living 'wall', leading to the elimination of seedlings and other native vegetation. Japanese climbing fern was added to the Florida Noxious Weed List in 1999. It is a major problem in pine plantations, causing contamination and harvesting problems for the pine straw industry.

For more information on how to properly identify and remove non-native, invasive plants, contact your local Extension Office or visit our website at [http://extension.ifas.ufl.edu/environment/invasive\\_species.html](http://extension.ifas.ufl.edu/environment/invasive_species.html).



**Chinese tallow tree**

Photo credit: Theresa Friday



**Hydrilla**

Photo credit: UGA, Bugwood.org



**Cogongrass**

Photo credit: Theresa Friday



**Air potato**

Photo credit: UGA, Bugwood.org



**Japanese climbing fern**

Photo credit: UGA, Bugwood.org

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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