The mimosa tree, or silktree, has been grown in Florida for many years because of its fragrant, showy pink flowers and feathery, fern-like foliage.

Mimosa is actually native to Asia. It was first introduced into the U.S. in 1745 by Andre Michaux. From its first foothold near Charleston, South Carolina, it has flourished throughout the eastern and southwestern United States and is widespread throughout Northwest Florida.

Mimosa flowers are like powderpuffs and are undeniably pretty. Many people have fond childhood memories of climbing mimosas or playing with the long, flat beanpods. But, there are several reasons not to plant them. They are weedy, short-lived, disease-prone, messy, produce prodigious amounts of seed, drip sap, and aggravate allergies.

But the most important reason not to plant or keep mimosas is that this tree is a non-native invasive species—it has a bad habit of taking over native Florida landscapes. It is considered an invasive weed by the Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council, the Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council, the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, The U.S. Forest Service, The National Park Service and the University of Florida.

Mimosa trees take advantage of sunny areas, growing up to forty feet tall. They are an ecological threat because they can grow in a variety of soils, produce large seed crops, and resprout when damaged. They are strong competitors to native trees and shrubs in open areas or forest edges. Dense stands of mimosa severely reduce the sunlight and nutrients available for other plants.

Mimosa spreads by both sprouts and by seed. Seeds have impermeable seed coats that allow them to remain dormant for many years. One study showed that 90% of the seeds were viable after five years and, for another species of mimosa, a third of its seeds germinated after 50 years in open storage. Seeds are mostly dispersed below or around the parent plant, but can be dispersed further by water.
set an example of good environmental stewardship and to preserve our natural history, consider removing these plants from landscapes and encourage others to do the same.

Removing non-native invasive plants from private property can eliminate a major source of invasion into our natural areas. Removal of these plants may seem a sacrifice for the property owner, but this loss can be a short-term problem. The removal of a mimosa will have a long-term, far-reaching benefit to Florida's natural areas.

The best way to get rid of a mimosa tree is to cut it down at ground level when it begins to flower. Stumps of trees that are cut down should always be treated with a herbicide to prevent regrowth.

Homeowners with only one or a few trees should use products containing the chemical triclopyr. Frequently sold as Brush-B-Gon or Brush Killer, these diluted herbicide products are available in many home improvement stores.

After removal, invasive non-native plants can be replaced with native plants or with non-native plants that are not invasive. For suggestions on non-invasive replacement plants, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service.

Mimosa is not alone in its invasive qualities. There is an ever-growing list of non-native plants found to threaten our native plant communities. For more information on invasive plants of the South, visit the web site at http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/environment/invasive_species.html.

Theresa Friday is the Residential 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. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension