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They Come - Those Invasive Plants
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Exactly what is an invasive plant? It's a plant growing where it's not wanted. It has the ability to thrive and spread aggressively outside of its natural range. It may be especially invasive when introduced to a new habitat, and it is non- native to a specific location. An invasive plant can disperse, establish, and spread in uncultivated areas. Some ways an invasive plant can get to your garden is by accident, as seed in an agriculture product, or in shipments from overseas.

An invasive plant can cause damage to other plants and the surrounding area by choking out other plant life and displacing native plants already growing. It can alter habitats for birds, insects, and other wildlife. Invasive plants can cause serious ecological disturbances and even interfere with recreational activities. They can increase wildfire and flood damage. Invasive plants produce large numbers of new plants. They spread easily and efficiently, usually by wind, water or animals.

Unfortunately, invasive plants can tolerate many soil types and weather conditions, and some invasive plants are worse than others. They can be more problematic in a natural environment than typical weeds, and can prevent seed production and delete seed reserves in the soil. Some varieties can remain viable in the soil for many years. Over 100 million dollars a year is spent in the United States combating invasive plants in wetlands alone. They are difficult to control because they are so well adapted to garden and landscape, can tolerate drought, and are free of natural enemies and disease.

Some examples of invasive plants are yellow star thistle, Scotch broom, English ivy, St Johns wort, water hyacinth, tamarisk, tree-of-heaven, Bermuda grass, pampas grass, ice plant, periwinkle

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kle (Vinca major -- not Vinca minor), waterlilies, fescue, wild blackberry, ragweed, bromus, Hawthorne, ragweed, and mesquite. There are 200 species of invasive plants in California alone that are a threat to our wild lands.

There are many things that you can do to help prevent the spread of invasive plants. Plant native plants and learn more and how to identify invasive species in your area. Regularly clean your boots, shoes, and tools to remove any plant parts that may spread invasive plants. Remove any unwanted plants and prevent new ones from growing. You can do this by proper soil preparation prior to planting - use mulches, weed mats and black plastic. Hoeing, hand pulling, and mowing on a regular basis helps. This works well with annual invasive plants as long as they are cut at or below soil level before seed is set. If necessary, you may need to use chemicals as a last means of prevention and control.

An excellent source to use to identify weed species and for weed management is the UC IPM website, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html>. Cal-IPC also has a very good website and puts out a helpful publication called "Don't Plant a Pest." Another website which may help is Plant Right, plantright.org.

Knowing the identity of a weed is the very first step in preventing invasive plants on your property. Fight back and you can be rid of those pesky invasive plants.

Join Master Gardener Eve Keener this Saturday, July 16th for a free class on Cottage Gardening. If you are one of those people who want to plant everything you see in the nursery, then a cottage garden is for you! No bare soil, and there are endless combinations of plants in these low maintenance gardens. Class is at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden from 9:00 a.m. to noon, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmer's Markets, and Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.