**FLORIDA PLANTS**

**What is a native plant?**

* Plants native to Florida are plants that were here before the arrival of the Europeans
* Plants native to this area of Florida have evolved mechanisms over the centuries that enable them to handle our climate.
* Hot dry weather in the spring, followed by even hotter wet and humid summers in infertile sandy soils, is a regime that many non-native plants will find hostile.
* In addition, native trees have had to be able to withstand the frequent hurricanes and tropical storms.
* **Native Plants** have evolved within their own ecological niches, and are not invasive within their own native ranges. Native plants provide food and shelter to our animals of all sorts, stability to our shorelines and fields, and visual pleasure of the highest order.
* Because a **native** plant species usually does not take over its home range, there is biodiversity -- a number of species growing in balance and living together in harmony.
* Florida Native Plants require less water, fertilizer and pesticides, thus benefiting our threatened environment. As shelter and food for birds, butterflies and other wildlife, native plants also support diverse ecosystems.

**What is a non-native plant?**

* Most of the plants sold in mainstream garden centers are exotic (meaning non-native). These plants come from all over the world. Many exotic plants are beneficial as edibles or ornamentals.
* Some exotic plants become invasive pest plants because they establish themselves outside of cultivation and disrupt the natural ecology of Florida, displacing native plants and destroying wildlife habitat.
* Plants not native to this area may lack the ability to thrive here without large inputs of water and fertilizer, and may be overly prone to disease.
* An important attribute of native plants is that they are necessary in maintaining populations of many types of native fauna including birds, butterflies and a wide variety of crucially important insect pollinators.
* The term **non-native** usually refers to plants from other countries, regions or continents; kariba weed (*Salvinia molesta* ) probably comes from Brazil, and Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) comes from South America, etc.
* However, the term can also apply to plants from another region (i.e., within the same country). An example: smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), a native desirable plant on the U.S. Atlantic coast is invasive on the Pacific coast, covering oyster beds and other vital habitat.
* **Not all non-native plants are problematic** . A wide variety of agricultural plants, such as tomatoes, citrus trees and other "economic crops" in Florida are obviously "good" and essential to human health and our economy. These plants are well managed by the farmers who plant them and sell their valuable products. Rarely do our non-native food crops spread as weeds. (As far as we know, there aren’t any forests being threatened by tomato plants.)
* Some ornamental non-native plants (roses,etc.) also are benign. Genetics, climate, soil, disease, insects prevent some cultivated plants from being able to spread on their own; they simply will not survive unless humans take care of them. As a result, they generally don’t cause any significant problems in the wild. Therefore, we have little to worry about when it comes to certain non-native plants that will not spread “on their own.”

**INVASIVE Plants: What’s the problem?**

* Under the right conditions, some non-native plants can become **invasive**. An **invasive plant is a non-native plant species that has escaped cultivation, is spreading on its own and causing environmental or economic harm.**
* ***Non-native Invasive*** plants can outgrow, replace, and otherwise destroy our native plants. That's because non-native plants usually do not have their natural enemies -- the diseases, insects and other environmental stresses -- that keep them in check in their native ranges.
* The destruction and replacement of our native plants has several significant consequences:
  + Our natural biodiversity is destroyed;
  + Our native plants can be eliminated;
  + Our wildlife have evolved to use native plants are not able to make use of non-native plants. As a result, they leave the area or die off;
  + invasive plants can completely fill the water column or cover the surface so that fish are driven from the area;
  + swimming, boating, hiking and other uses can be affected or even dangerous in areas with invasive plants.

**Native vs Non-native?**

* <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/21?letter=A>

**Invasive?**

* <http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/unitedstates/fl.shtml>

**Active Eradication**

* <http://www.floridasnature.com/exotics.htm>

**Melaleuca**

* *Melaleuca quinquenervia*
* Seeds were intentionally scattered by air over the Everglades in the 1930's with the idea being to help dry out swamps, it is now a major pest in south Florida, particularly in wetland habitats. This fast growing (3-6 feet a year) Australian native forms very dense stands, crowding out all other plants.

**Brazilian Pepper Tree**

* *Schinus terebinthifolius*
* An aggressive invader of many habitats, the Brazilian pepper tree is estimated to occupy over 700,000 acres in central and southern Florida. Leaves have a "peppery" smell when crushed. Sap is a irritant similar to that of Poison Ivy to which it is related. Smoke from burning wood is also toxic.

**Australian pine**

* *Casuarina equisetifolia*
* Illegal to plant in many areas.

**Poisonous Plants**

* <http://www.med.miami.edu/poisoncontrol/x35.xml>

**Oleander**

* ***Nerium oleander*** 
  + One of the most toxic and common poisonous plants is the Oleander. The entire plant is toxic. The Oleander plant contains a deadly heart stimulant that resembles the prescription drug digitalis. If a child (or small pet) eats a single leaf or two from this plant it could be deadly. There have been several instances where people have died from eating meats that were roasted from a wood fire that contained Oleander twigs or branches. People have died from eating cakes decorated with oleander flowers.

**Castor Bean**

*Ricinus communis*

* + If the seed is swallowed without chewing, and there is no damage to the seed coat, it will most likely pass harmlessly through the digestive tract. However, if it is chewed or broken and then swallowed, the ricin toxin will be absorbed by the intestines.
  + Just one seed can kill a child, 8 seeds are considered toxic for an adult.
* They are unquestionably among the most deadly seeds on earth, and it is their irresistible appearance that makes them so dangerous.

**Rosary Pea**

* ***Abrus precatorius***
* Toxins are released only if the seed is chewed and swallowed. Other parts of the plant are not poisonous and animals are not often poisoned.  However, poisoning is very serious as abrin is one of the most toxic compounds known.  As little as 0.00015% body weight will cause fatality in humans.  All animal species are susceptible.