

WHAT ARE INVASIVE PLANTS?

Slide 1

The following slides will define invasive species overall, and specifically, invasive plants. In this slide are three invasive plants that are regularly seen throughout St. Lucie County. From left to right (L to R) is air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*), and Australian Pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*). For more information regarding these and other invasive plants throughout this slide show, visit the Invasive Plant Atlas of the United States at invasiveplantatlas.org.

Slide 2

We often hear the words “invasive species” followed by disturbing reports of pesky mosquitoes, predatory lionfish, and intimidating reptiles such as Burmese pythons, Nile monitor lizards, and Argentinean tegus. These invasive species attract a lot of media attention because they are frightening, they are detrimental to Florida’s wildlife, and they continue to expand, both in population size and into new areas. But did you know invasive plants can be just as menacing? While invasive plants don’t physically behave in the same ways, they do have negative impacts on Florida.

Slide 3

Executive Order (EO) 13112 defines invasive species as species that are non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health. Invasive species can be plants, animals, or pathogens.

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It is important to know and understand the expressions that are used to describe plants, and the definition of these terminologies. These definitions are provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA, NRCS), unless noted otherwise:

A **native plant** is a plant that is a part of the balance of nature that has developed over hundreds or thousands of years in a particular region or ecosystem.

An **invasive plant** is a plant that is non-native and able to establish on many sites, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting plant communities or ecosystems.

A **non-native plant** or **alien plant** (these terms may be used interchangeably) are plants that were introduced with human help (intentionally or accidentally) to a new place or new type of habitat where it was not previously found.

An **exotic plant** is a plant not native to the continent on which it is now found (for example, plants from Europe are exotic in North America and vice versa).

Slide 5

A **weed** is a plant (native or non-native) that is not valued in the place where it is growing (USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service [APHIS]), and poses a major threat to agriculture and/or natural ecosystems within the United States.

A **noxious weed** or **noxious plant** are any plants or plant products that can directly or indirectly injure or cause damage to crops (including nursery stock or plant products), livestock, poultry or other interests of agriculture, irrigation, navigation, the natural resources of the United States, the public health, or the environment (USDA, NRCS). **Note: USDA APHIS maintains a list of federally-recognized noxious weeds. It is illegal to import Federally listed noxious weeds or transport them across state lines. Some states (for instance, Florida) and/or some counties (for instance, St. Lucie County), maintain lists and have passed laws regarding responsibilities for their control. Visit freshfromflorida.com for the Florida Noxious Weeds Rule 5B-57. Regulations regarding St. Lucie County will be addressed in the next slide show.*

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All exotic plants are not invasive; in fact, only a small percent of introduced species ever become invasive. For example, according to the University of Florida's Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, there are approximately 1,400 non-native plants in Florida; about 11% of those have become established and are either invasive or becoming problematic.

Some species are present for many years before they exhibit invasive characteristics. Many invasive species go through a period known as a "lag phase" in which their populations grow slowly until they reach a size large enough for the population to explode and/or become adapted to the local environment and become invasive. An example of this lag phase is with *Melaleuca*. *Melaleuca* was first introduced to Florida in the late 1880s. After several more introductions into the state, and numerous distribution of seeds and saplings in the early 1900s, there was evidence that *Melaleuca* was escaping cultivation and becoming naturalized in Florida by the mid-1920s (Dray et al 2006; photo by CERP). By 1993 it was estimated that *Melaleuca* covered nearly 500,000 ac in South Florida and colonized up to twenty percent (20%) of all natural land south of Lake Okeechobee.

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Thank you for watching! For information regarding removing Category I invasive plants, visit stlucieco.gov or call the Environmental Resources Department Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. at 772-462-2526.