



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Don't Plant This: Plant That (April 26, 2025)

by Sharon Plein, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

Perhaps you have seen those popular nutrition cookbooks titled "Don't Eat This: Eat That." They are a series of books designed to save calories and promote weight loss while providing an equally tasty but lower-calorie substitute. Master Gardeners have learned about similar publications from the Plant Right Organization (plantright.org) that encourage homeowners and gardeners to plant alternatives to invasive non-native garden species.

The Plant Right Organization's mission is to help the ornamental horticulture industry prevent costly problems of invasive non-native garden plants in the nursery trade and to advise homeowners about how these plants harm the environment. Most of the plants that we use in our landscapes are non-native. That means they were brought here from somewhere else. The majority of these plants are not the troublemakers that Plant Right warns us about, but there are a small number of plants that homeowners should avoid.

Invasive Plants

Invasive plants are non-native plants that "out-compete" other plants for water and space. They easily spread throughout a garden, eventually becoming the uninvited guests at your garden party. Worse yet, they can escape from the confines of a garden and rapidly spread into open areas where they can cause serious ecological problems like flooding, fire, and crop losses. When these plants spread into natural areas, they do not have natural predators like insects, diseases, or animals that control their growth and spread. They crowd out the native plants by reproducing via seeds dispersed by animals, water, or wind. Many of these plants are spread by vegetative parts like bulbs, corms, rhizomes, or even pieces of uprooted plants. Before long, there was a lack of habitat for our native plants and wildlife. The expanse of land that these invaders occupy makes controlling them difficult and costly.

Plants to Avoid

Plant Right currently lists seven invasive plants that are sometimes sold in our climate zone and suggests beautiful non-invasive alternatives to meet the same purpose in the landscape.



Ornamental Grasses

This category of plants is both drought-tolerant and attractive. There are two invasive varieties to avoid planting because they can increase fire danger and cause crop damage. They are Mexican Feathergrass (*Nassella/Stipa tenuissima*) and Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia selloana*). Alternatives to consider include Blue grama grass (*Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition') and Foerster's reed grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'). The Latin botanical names are written in italics because shopping for plants with common names can be confusing since similar plants may be called by the same common name.

Groundcovers

Plant Right identifies Big Leaf Periwinkle (*Vinca major*) as an invasive species. If you plant this vining ground cover in your garden, you will live to regret it because it spreads rapidly and forms a very dense mat of underground stems that is difficult to penetrate and eradicate. Additionally, the thick, shiny leaves are resistant to commonly used herbicides. If you like the shiny leaves and blue flowers of the Big Leaf Periwinkle, try Bee's Bliss sage (*Salvia* 'Bee's Bliss') or Yerba Buena (*Clinopodium douglasii*) instead.



Trees and Shrubs

The Chinese Tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera* also known as *Sapium sebiferum*) was once a popular tree in local landscapes because of the white waxy fruits that remain after the leaves have fallen. These trees have vibrant fall colors, and the fruit has biodiesel properties, but it is an explosive propagator. It produces 100,000 seeds per year, and its roots and branches can readily produce new plants. The Chinese Tallow tree has caused large-scale ecosystem modification, and in many parts of the country, ecology groups are working to stamp out this plant pest. Retailers have mostly phased this tree out of their plant lists, but if you should happen across it, don't plant it. Plant a Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) or a Red Maple (*Acer rubrum* 'October Glory') instead.



French Broom (*Genista monspessulana*) and Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) are two similar upright shrubs with yellow pea-like flowers. They grow very quickly and produce thousands of seeds that literally explode from pods and can land more than 9 feet away. These shrubs can grow 4-10 feet tall, and once in the wild, will dominate a plant community. They burn rapidly and can spread fires

into the canopies of nearby trees. Most invasive brooms have been retired from the invasive plant list, as nursery surveys show they were found at less than 1% of stores for three consecutive years. If you should find them available, plant instead Yellow Bush Daisy (*Euryops pectinatus*) or Forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*) for the same look.

Water Plants

If you have a pond, stream, or other water feature on your property, you will want to avoid planting Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) and Yellow Water Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*). These invasive water plants reproduce rapidly and are extremely difficult to eradicate. They choke waterways, impact water flow, and degrade fish habitats by depleting oxygen from the water and crowding out native species. Instead of the Water Hyacinth, plant the King of Siam Water Lily (*Nymphaea 'King of Siam'*). Instead of a Yellow Water Iris, choose a Japanese Iris (*Iris ensata* and cultivars.)



Each year, the state of California spends more than \$82 million dollars fighting and controlling invasive plants. Homeowners can contribute to the control effort and help preserve open spaces and local economies by choosing alternatives to invasive garden plants. For a more complete list of alternative landscape plants, contact the Plant Right Organization at www.plantright.org.

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

Visit our website for past articles, sign up for our e-newsletter, or email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mgtularekings14/>; Instagram at: @mgtularekings

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Luis Nursery, 2nd Saturday, 10 am – 2 pm, 139 S. Mariposa Ave., Visalia

Hofman's Nursery, 3rd Saturday, 10 am – 1 pm, 12491 W Lacey Blvd., Hanford

Springville Farmer's Market, 3rd Saturday, 10 am – Noon, Springville