

Home invaders: Pretty plants turn ugly fast

Judy Richter, Special to The Chronicle

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They look pretty and often smell good, but some common landscape plants are nothing more than invaders in disguise.

Plants like Scotch broom and some of its cousins, along with some ice plants, pampas grass and others, muscle out native plants, which attract a variety of insects and animals.

Because they create a monoculture and disrupt biodiversity, invasive plants cause other ecological problems that can lead to floods, fires and crop losses. Many don't have natural predators to control them.

Brooms, for example, are hardy shrubs with fragrant yellow blossoms in the spring, but they block light and take up water. They can produce as many as 12,000 seeds per plant, forming dense stands and dominating the landscape. Moreover, the seeds can remain viable for as long as 25 years.

Highway ice plants and crystalline ice plants are other invaders. They have been planted along highways and in sandy soils "because they establish quickly, spread easily and control erosion," said Carolyn Brown, a spokeswoman for Sustainable Conservation, a San Francisco nonprofit that works with business, agriculture and government to find ways to protect and improve the environment.

These qualities have resulted in ice plants "blanketing the coast from north of San Francisco all the way south to Mexico and on the Channel Islands. Ice plant increases soil salt content and blocks light for other species, crowding out fragile ecosystems," Brown said in a statement.

Many invasive plants also are hardy, drought resistant and deer resistant - qualities desired by many California gardeners - but they crowd out native plants, "monopolizing sun and space," said Terri Kempton of Sustainable Conservation. "They aren't appropriate for here."

Kempton manages the steering committee for California Horticultural Invasives Prevention, or Cal-HIP, a statewide industry group.

Fortunately, other plants can be just as pretty with just the same desirable qualities minus the tendency to take over the landscape.

Cal-HIP has started PlantRight, the industry's voluntary effort to stop growing, selling and promoting invasive landscape plants that have been stocked by nurseries and garden centers. (Weeds aren't part of the campaign because they aren't commercially propagated and sold.)

Instead, Cal-HIP and PlantRight promote business-friendly practices, such as stocking suitable replacement plants. "A lot of customers are looking for responsible and environmentally friendly businesses," Kempton said.

"Invasive species are a leading threat to biodiversity, second only to habitat destruction. ... In California, \$87 million in taxpayer funds goes to fighting invasive plants and animals every year," Cal-HIP says.

Cal-HIP began as an industry effort in 2004. Now its PlantRight is starting a public-education campaign that begins Thursday at Tilden Botanic Garden in Berkeley.

Scheduled from 3 to 5 p.m., it features Sue Fritzke of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and her talk, "Protecting Wildlands Through Noninvasive Gardening," at 3:30 p.m. A garden tour and reception will follow. For information, call (415) 977-0380, Ext. 305.

Determining which plants cause problems in various parts of the state was done by the Cal-HIP steering committee of industry representatives, landscape architects and designers, conservationists, academics and agricultural officials.

"These are committed and forward-thinking leaders in the field," Kempton said.

They use "objective, scientific criteria and direct observations to make recommendations about invasive plants," according to the PlantRight Web site (www.plantright.org).

While they have come up with regional lists that include 11 invasive plants of the North and Central coasts, Sunset Zones 14 to 17, they're still studying some others. For example, pampas grass is on the list of 11, but some cultivars don't produce much seed, so they might not be as invasive.

Ivy is invasive, but it comes in hundreds of varieties that are difficult to distinguish from one another, so maybe some of them are safe to plant. The jury is still out.

Other plants under suspicion but not yet convicted are cotoneaster, wild fennel, Washington palm, Brazilian peppertree, licorice plant, pennyroyal and edible fig.

The PlantRight Web site lists and pictures invasive plants. In addition, it suggests and pictures desirable alternatives along with descriptions and horticultural needs.

Kempton also suggests that gardeners consult with their nursery professionals about alternatives. "We would like to encourage people to make good choices," she said.

"In some respects, the planet is our garden."

Inside

A comprehensive list of the invasive plants of the North and Central coasts (Sunset Zones 14-17) and recommended alternatives. **Page F4**

Invasive plants of the north and central coasts (sunset zones 14-17)

Arundo, giant reed (*Arundo donax*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Clumping bamboos (*Bambusa multiplex*, *B. oldhamii*, *Fargesia nitida*)

New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax* cultivars)

Blue gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

Fern-leafed Catalina ironwood (*Lyonothamnus floribundus* ssp. *asplenifolius*)

Noninvasive eucalyptus (*E. spp.*)

Brooms: Scotch broom, striated broom, French broom, bridal veil broom, Spanish broom (*Cytisus scorparius*, *C. striatus*, *Genista monspessulana*, *Retama monosperma*, *Spartium junceum*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*)

Shrubby cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*)

Yellow bush daisy (*Euryops pectinatus*)

Bush marigold (*Tagetes lemmonii*)

California flannel bush (*Fremontodendron californicum*, *F. cultivars*)

Golden current (*Ribes aureum*)

Golden lady slipper (*Calceolaria integrifolia* 'Golden Nugget')

Halimium (*Halimium lasianthum*)

Japanese kerria (*Kerria japonica*)

Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*)

Landscaping rose (*Rosa spp.*)

Capeweed (*Arctotheca calendula*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

African daisy (*Arctotis hybrids*)

Dymondia (*Dymondia margaretae*)

Manzanita groundcovers (*Arctostaphylos* spp.)

California or Santa Barbara honeysuckle (*Lonicera subspicata* var. *denudata*)

Green fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*)

Deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*)

Sedge cultivars (*Carex* spp.)

California fescue (*Festuca californica*)

Purple fountain grass (*P. setaceum* 'Rubrum')

Ice plants: crystalline ice plant, highway ice plant (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*,

Carpobrotus edulis)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Beach strawberry or woody strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis* or *F. vesca*)

Myoporum groundcover (*Myoporum parvifolium* 'Prostratum')

Noninvasive ice plant (*Delosperma cooperi*)

Germander (*Teucrium chamaedrys* or *T. lucidrys*)

Prostrate coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis* var.

pilularis or *consanguineum*)

Rosea ice plant (*Drosanthemum floribundum*)

Whorled stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*)

Myoporum (*Myoporum laetum*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Griselinia (*Griselinia littoralis*)

Sweet bay (*Laurus nobili*)

Toyon, Christmas berry, California holly (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)

Dwarf magnolia 'Little Gem' (*Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem')

Evergreen viburnums (*Viburnum awabuki*, *V. tinus*, *V. suspensum*)

Pacific wax myrtle (*Morella californica*)

Peppermint tree (*Agonis flexuosa*)

Pampas grass (unnamed cultivars of *Cortaderia jubata* and *selloana*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Canyon Prince giant rye (*Leymus condensatus* 'Canyon Prince')

Deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*)

Pink muhly grass (*M. capillaries*)

Lindheimer's muhly grass (*M. lindheimeri*)

Periwinkle (*Vinca major*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Hardy geranium (*Geranium 'Rozanne'*)

Serbian bellflower (*Campanula poscharskyana*)

Star jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*)

Sweet box groundcover (*Sarcococca hookerana humilis*)

Bear's-foot hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*)

Coral bells, giant alumroot (*Heuchera maxima*)

Creeping barberry (*Berberis repens*)

Evergreen current (*Ribes viburnifolium*)

Heartleaf bergenia (*Bergenia cordifolia* and hybrids)

Hummingbird sage (*Salvia spathacea*)

Pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*)

Scaevola (*Scaevola aemula*)

Taiwan raspberry (*Rubus pentalobus*)

Wild ginger (*Asarum caudatum*)

Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Arizona cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*)

Desert willow, desert catalpa (*Chilopsis linearis*)

Fruitless olive (*Olea europaea* 'Swan Hill,' 'Majestic Beauty,' 'Little Ollie,' 'Wilsoni')

Coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica*)

Goldenrain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)

Japanese blueberry tree (*Elaeocarpus decipiens*)

Trident maple (*Acer buergeranum*)

Saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*)

-- Recommended alternatives:

Australian willow, geijera (*Geijera parviflora*)

Desert willow, desert catalpa (*Chilopsis linearis*)

Western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*)

Coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*)

Note: PlantRight also lists scarlet wisteria (*Sesbania punicea*), but a spokeswoman says it's not a problem in the Bay Area. However, it is troublesome in the Central Valley.

Source: www.plantright.org

Send comments to home@sfchronicle.com.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/03/15/HO00VHCDH.DTL>

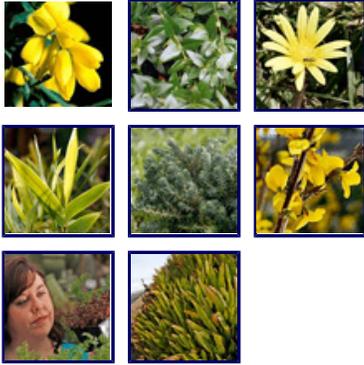
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What to avoid: Scotch broom, also known as *Cytisus scorparius*, grows with abandon. The Nature Conservancy photo by Barry Rice



The Nature Conservancy / Barry Rice

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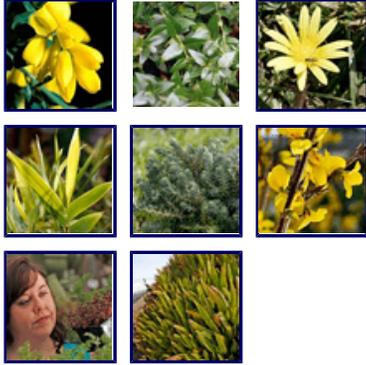
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What to avoid: Vinca major is perhaps best known by the color of its flower, Periwinkle. The Nature Conservancy photo by John Randall



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What to avoid: *Arctotheca calendula*, commonly known as capeweed, is an invasive species. Chronicle photo, 2005, by Deanne Fitzmaurice



Chronicle 2005

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What to plant instead: Clumping bamboo offers a noninvasive alternative to arundo bamboo. Chronicle photo by Eric Luse



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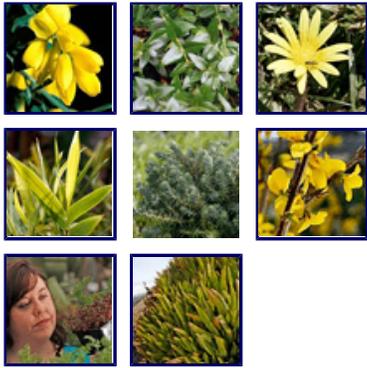
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What to plant instead: Sedum 'Blue Spruce' is another noninvasive plant. Chronicle photo by Eric Luse



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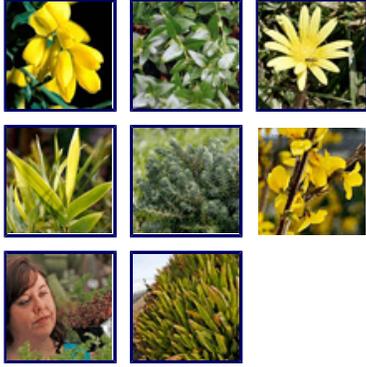
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What to plant instead: Forsythia is a noninvasive plant that's a good alternative to the invasive broom. Chronicle photo by Eric Luse



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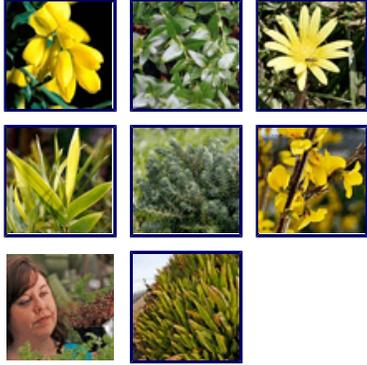
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Terri Kempton, of the San Francisco nonprofit Sustainable Conservation, inspects the noninvasive sedum 'Dragon's Blood.' Chronicle photo by Eric Luse



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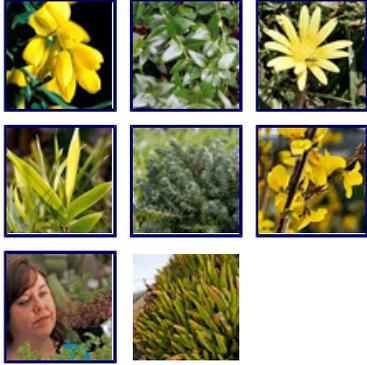
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The invasive ice plant along Ocean Beach was once thought to control sand dunes but is now known to destroy animal habitat and native plants. Chronicle photo by Eric Luse



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