

Plant Right

California home gardeners protect wildlands and wildlife by avoiding invasive plants.

By Ann Schmidt-Fogarty

With a burst of spring energy, California's PlantRight campaign has kicked off across the state to empower home gardeners to avoid using invasive plants. Invasive species are the second leading threat to wildlife and biodiversity, and are expensive for public parks and agencies to remove. Although most garden plants are not a threat, more than half of invasive plants originally arrived through gardens and landscaping, so home gardening choices matter. The PlantRight campaign is led by a diverse partnership of the horticulture industry, environmental groups, scientists, public agencies and other experts to help home gardeners make smart gardening choices that protect California's unique wildlands and wildlife.

"Most of the plants used in gardens and landscaping do not invade natural areas and harm wildlife. But a few species can – and do – escape from cultivated areas into open landscapes and cause serious ecological problems," said Terri Kempton, PlantRight Manager at Sustainable Conservation. "Fortunately, there are plenty of beautiful, safe alternatives to invasives, so it's easy for gardeners to find plants that will thrive in their yard.

For each region of California, PlantRight's steering committee identified the problem plants and non-invasive alternatives that will thrive in that area. These are shown on the PlantRight website, www.PlantRight.org.

The PlantRight campaign asks gardeners to: (1) Avoid planting invasives; (2) Plant beautiful non-invasive alternatives; (3) Find local retail partners and other resources at www.PlantRight.org.

"Invasive plants like brooms, *Arundo donax* and iceplant cause significant harm to parks and natural areas across California," said Ruth Coleman, Director of California State Parks. "They crowd out native plants, insects and animals. Once they take hold, they are expensive to remove or control. Invasions can also lead to flooding and fires."

For example, *Arundo donax* (giant reed) forms massive stands that crowd out the native plants that provide valuable habitat for birds and other wildlife. At least 10 protected animal species in California, including the endangered bird the Least Bell's Vireo, suffer habitat loss due to invading *Arundo*. These tall plants burn quickly and at high temperatures, allowing flames to jump streams that would normally act as barriers to the spread of wildfires. Safe alternatives include Clumping Bamboos (*Bamboos multiplex*, *B. oldhamii*, *Fargesia nitida*) and New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax* cultivars).

Nationally, invasive plants cost more than \$35 billion per year in eradication work and economic losses. In California alone, \$85 million in taxpayer funds go to fighting invasive species every year. Fortunately, home gardeners and professionals are making smart choices to avoid planting invasive varieties.

"Plant growers, garden centers and landscaping professionals can help gardening enthusiasts find the perfect match for their needs," said Bob Falconer, Executive Vice President, California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers.

In addition to being environmentally responsible, some non-invasive plants offer additional benefits such as drought resistance, lower fertilizer requirements, attracting wildlife and reducing fire risks.

About PlantRight

PlantRight was created by the California Horticultural Invasives Prevention (Cal-HIP) partnership to help protect California wildlands and wildlife from invasive plants. Sustainable Conservation, a nonprofit organization known for forging lasting collaborative solutions to critical environmental problems, created the Cal-HIP partnership and manages PlantRight. www.PlantRight.org.