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In the Garden

Preventing invasive plants

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Published: Thursday, June 3, 2010 at 3:45 p.m.

PlantRight is a California organization, the aim of which is to educate and inspire both the horticultural and gardening public to prevent new introductions of invasive plants in our state. Most garden plants are not a threat; however, more than half of the documented invasive plants in the United States arrived as garden or landscape plants. So it really does make a difference as to what we home gardeners buy and plant.



Judy Brinkerhoff

I recently acquired three cardoons, those huge lovely plants that look so much like artichokes. Before putting them in among my other shrubby plants, I did some research, as I always do before planting a new plant. Lo and behold, I found out that they can be quite invasive, that they have in fact escaped in Southern California and are quite a problem. They are a giant thistle and their seeds blow free, as do my artichoke seeds. I have had to pull artichoke seedlings or give them away, but I'm not certain I want to take a risk with the cardoons. Anyone out there have any experience with them?

PlantRight has divided California into five regions and identified the problem plants and prepared lists of non-invasive alternative plants. The problem plants include: Giant reed (*Arundo donax*); French and Spanish brooms; Periwinkle (*Vinca major*); Pampas grass or Jubata grass (*Cortaderia selloana*, *C. jubata*); Fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*); Two Iceplants; Blue gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*); Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*); Saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*); and several others.

Please see their Web site for further information: www.plantright.org

My beautiful native California mock orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*) is just coming into bloom. The flowers are a brilliant white; the leaves a soft spring green. The flowers are wonderfully fragrant. The mock orange likes light sun, perhaps dappled shade. Mine has become a fairly dense clump of slender twigs and has grown rapidly. It sits beside a twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*), which has just finished its hummingbird-attractive flowers and is now beginning to bear its characteristic twin berries, which the birds will find. Both shrubs are drought tolerant and should be easy to find in native plant nurseries.

I've just planted about 10 sunflowers that will grow tall into the sun. I do it because

of the lesser goldfinches and their love for the leaves. Each summer, they come in to shred and gobble them up ... their salad bar, apparently. Something in that greenery.

Occidental Arts & Ecology Center invites the public to a two-hour tour of its organic gardens on June 20 from 10 a.m. until noon. Thousands of varieties of rare and endangered food and ornamental plants are preserved at the gardens. A suggested donation of \$10 is requested. Please call 874-1557, ext. 201, for more information.

The Milo Baker chapter of California Native Plant Society offers a program on the restoration of the tidal marsh upland at San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge on June 15 at 7:30 p.m. The program is presented by Giselle Block, a biologist within the S.F. Bay Complex. Meetings are held at the Luther Burbank Art & Garden Center, 2050 Yulupa Ave. in Santa Rosa.

In case you haven't yet been to the Melissa Garden to see the bees and the bee gardens, there are tours monthly through September. You'll learn so much about the problems honeybees face and how to help them, which plants to grow and more. The June tour is on the 11th. Tours run about an hour, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Go to: www.themelissagarden.com to register and get travel directions.

(Judy Brinkerhoff has been studying native plants for more than 20 years. She is the author of two other Sonoma County gardening columns. E-mail her at joodbrink@com.cast.net.)

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