

Invasive Plants Sold in California

Sustainable Conservation's PlantRight program works with California's nursery industry to voluntarily stop the propagation, distribution, and sale of invasive garden plants. PlantRight's steering committee, which guides PlantRight's overall strategy and impact, includes well-known growers and retailers, the University of California, and other groups concerned about the threat of invasive plants. PlantRight also promotes alternative ornamental plants that are environmentally safe and commercially viable.

Through its annual Spring Nursery Survey, PlantRight tracks the availability of invasive garden plants in California. Data collected help inform PlantRight's strategy, enabling the organization to monitor the effectiveness of its work over time. PlantRight randomly selected 251 retail nurseries to survey in 2011 from a total pool of about 3,100 stores in California. One hundred forty-three volunteers, mostly UC Master Gardeners, surveyed 226 nurseries in 38 counties for the presence or absence of 19 invasive plants (Table 1).

Results

In 2011, 70% of the nurseries surveyed weren't selling any of PlantRight's 19 invasive garden plants. Of the stores that were selling invasives, the majority sold only one invasive species. About 40% of small, independent, and large retailers were carrying invasive garden plants, compared to just 9% of big-box stores. Although small and independent retailers were more likely than other types of stores to carry an invasive plant, the difference between larger chain stores and the other store types wasn't statistically significant.

Stores carrying invasive plants are most prevalent in California's South Coast region and less prevalent in the other regions. For the desert, Sierra, and coastal mountain regions, only a small number of stores were included in the survey, so the inference that fewer stores in these regions



J. M. DiTomaso, UC Davis

Figure 1. Periwinkle was the most frequently found invasive plant in nurseries.

carry invasive plants is uncertain; this is particularly true for the desert region.

When the results are viewed by both region and store type, it is noteworthy that small and independent stores in the South Coast region were carrying the most invasive plants. These stores also comprise half of the stores that were surveyed in 2011 due to the high concentration of nurseries in Southern California. No other significant differences emerged when comparing different regions by store type.

Most Commonly Sold Plants

The most frequently found invasive garden plant in the survey was periwinkle (Figure 1) (found at 16% of stores surveyed), pampas grass (9%), and green fountain grass (8%). While focusing education efforts on these three species would potentially have the largest impact, their prevalence also indicates that they represent significant sources of revenue for the nursery industry, which presents challenges in eliminating these plants. The survey found highway iceplant, Chinese tallow tree, Scotch broom, myoporum, and Spanish broom at fewer than 3% of stores surveyed; therefore, these species may be easier to remove from circulation.

The data from this survey, in combination with PlantRight's knowledge of the relative threat posed by each species, will help the organization determine how best to partner with growers and suppliers. Over time, the annual survey is an excellent tool for gauging the effectiveness of PlantRight's efforts to stop the propagation, distribution, and sale of invasive garden plants in California.

For more information about this survey and PlantRight's efforts to stop the

Table 1. PlantRight's 19 Invasive Garden Plants.*

Common name	Scientific name
Arundo, giant reed	<i>Arundo donax</i>
Blue gum	<i>Eucalyptus globulus</i>
Bridal veil broom	<i>Retama monosperma</i>
Capeweed	<i>Arctotheca calendula</i>
Chinese tallow tree	<i>Sapium sebiferum</i>
Crystalline iceplant	<i>Mesembryanthemum crystallinum</i>
French broom	<i>Genista monspessulana</i>
Green fountain grass	<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>
Highway iceplant	<i>Carpobrotus edulis</i>
Jubata grass	<i>Cortaderia jubata</i>
Myoporum	<i>Myoporum laetum</i>
Pampas grass	<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>
Periwinkle	<i>Vinca major</i>
Russian olive	<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>
Saltcedar	<i>Tamarix ramosissima</i>
Scarlet wisteria	<i>Sesbania punicea</i>
Scotch broom	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>
Spanish broom	<i>Spartium junceum</i>
Striated broom	<i>Cytisus striatus</i>

* Selected as the most problematic in California. Impact may vary by region.

sale of invasive plants in California, visit <http://www.plantright.org>. The 2011 survey fact sheet is available at <http://www.plantright.org/spring-nursery-survey>. A 2012 survey of stores began in March, and results can be expected in the fall.

—Christiana Conser, Project Scientist, Sustainable Conservation, PlantRight Program, cconser@suscon.org

Editor's note: This article was slightly modified, with permission from the author, from an article that ran in the Fall 2011 issue of Cal-IPC News, <http://www.cal-ipc.org/resources/news/index.php>.