

# Don't Plant a Pest!

Give them an inch and they'll take an acre...



Scotch Brooms create a serious fire hazard in the Sierra Foothill region.

Suggested alternatives for invasive garden plants

Sierra Foothills Region

## Gardening Responsibly

California is a gardener's dream. Our Mediterranean climate allows us to have fantastic gardens showcasing a wide variety of ornamental plants from all around the world. Unfortunately, some of these are serious invasive plants, threatening California's biodiversity and economy. That's because some of our plants don't stay in the garden. They "jump the fence" when seeds, roots or stem fragments spread to other areas. Because of their highly aggressive nature, invasive plants out-compete desirable plants. Once established, they damage wildlife habitat, impair water resources, increase soil erosion, degrade agriculture lands, create fire hazards and reduce recreational opportunities.



English ivy (*Hedera helix*) climbing on an oak tree. Photo by J. M. DiTomaso

Some of these plants show weedy tendencies in the garden. For example, English and Algerian ivy can take over a yard and damage buildings and fences. When birds drop seeds from these ivies near a stream the plants can take over, displacing native vegetation and degrading wildlife habitat. As another example Scotch broom can quickly take over both landscaped and natural areas on your property. This plant is highly flammable and can increase the potential of wildfire.

Gardeners don't plant invasive species intentionally. Like other Californians, gardeners have a deep respect for our state's rich natural heritage. The good news is that most garden plants behave perfectly well in their intended roles. By choosing suitable replacements for the problem plants, we can save ourselves and our neighbors trouble and expense while helping to protect California's landscapes from invasive plants.

Invasive plants are, by nature, a regional or local problem. A plant that jumps out of the garden in one climate and habitat type may behave perfectly in

another. The problem plants listed here have escaped from gardens throughout the Sierra foothill region. For additional plants and lists of invasive plants in other regions of the state, see the California Invasive Plant Council website at [www.cal-ipc.org](http://www.cal-ipc.org).

### How to use this brochure:

This brochure features the most common invasive non-native pest plants that are sold in nurseries or "shared" by unknowing gardeners and suggests safe alternatives for these plants. When you are buying new plants, consider these alternatives, or ask your local nursery for other noninvasive plants. If any of these invasive plants are already in your yard, especially if you live near a natural area or waterway, you should remove them and replace them with a suggested alternative.

- Full sun
- Part shade
- Full shade
- Regular water
- Medium water
- Low water
- California native

Think about why you might plant one of the problem plants in the first place. If it is for appearance, finding a replacement is often easy - some of the alternatives listed here are selected especially for their similar appearance. If you need a plant to fill a functional role, such as a groundcover that grows well in a shady place, or a border plant that likes full sun, the alternatives listed here thrive in the same environments as problem plants. Both native and non-native plants have been recommended as alternatives in this brochure. Many of these alternatives are readily available; others may be easiest to find in specialty or native plant nurseries.

Pay close attention to plant names when looking for non-invasive alternatives since a few of our recommended plants may have invasive relatives - even in the same genus.

Many of the characteristics that make a plant a good choice for the garden may also make it a successful invader:

Garden Plants	Invasive Plants
Easy to propagate	Broad germination
Establish rapidly	Colonizer
Mature early	Mature early
Abundant flowers	Prolific seeds
Pest/disease tolerant	Few natural predators

## GROUND COVERS

### DO NOT PLANT! INVASIVE!



**Periwinkle**  
(*Vinca major*)

This aggressive grower has trailing stems that root wherever they touch the soil. This ability to resprout from stem fragments enables periwinkle to spread rapidly

in shady drainages and creeks, smothering the native plant community and reducing available wildlife habitat and forage.



Missouri Botanical Garden

**English ivy, Algerian ivy**  
(*Hedera helix*, *Hedera canariensis*)

Some ivy species in the *Hedera* genus are invasive. Ivies can climb trees and under-story plants causing damage by completely shading them. Shading also prevents regeneration of new trees and shrubs. Birds often spread the berries of these ivies into riparian and wildland areas. Ivy also harbors pests, such as rats and snails. It is difficult to distinguish problem ivies from less invasive ones. Never dispose of ivy cuttings into natural areas.

### TRY PLANTING THESE INSTEAD

**Star jasmine**   
(*Trachelospermum jasminoides*)



Photo by C. Martus

Evergreen, vining groundcover with glossy, dark green leaves and pale yellow, pinwheel-shaped flowers with a jasmine scent.

**Common yarrow**   
(*Achillea millefolium*)



Native, perennial with finely divided leaves and white flower heads. White flowers in spring, blooms can be prolonged by cutting back old flower stocks or mowing.

**Cinquefoil**   
(*Potentilla* species)



Sturdy, unfussy perennials that flower mid- to late spring. Leaves are reminiscent of strawberry foliage.

*Potentilla glandulosa* is a common native forest understory perennial in the Sierra foothill region.

**Pachysandra**   
(*Pachysandra terminalis*)



Missouri Botanical Garden

Evergreen leaves are shiny dark green; small white flowers on 1-2" spikes; withstands shade and is widely used under trees. Grows more slowly than ivy or periwinkle but has a crisp, neat growth form.

**Carpet bugle/Ajuga**   
(*Ajuga reptans*)



This popular ground cover spreads quickly by runners, making a mat of dark green leaves. Blue flowers appear in spring and early summer.

**Creeping mahonia**   
(*Mahonia repens*)



Photo by Wm. Hewlett

Prickly leaves, short clusters of flowers in mid- to late spring followed by blue berries; good winter color.

**Also try:** Dwarf coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis* or *cultivars*); Creeping manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* species.); California wild grape - native (*Vitis californica*); *Vinca minor*, which to date has not been found to be invasive; Creeping sage - native (*Salvia sonomensis*).

## ORNAMENTAL GRASSES AND SCREENS

### DON'T PLANT! INVASIVE!

**Green fountain grass**  
(*Pennisetum setaceum*)



Spreads aggressively via seed by wind, water or hitch hiking on vehicles and animals. Dense infestations can crowd out native and other desirable

vegetation and increase fire hazard. Existing research indicates that red varieties (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum') are not invasive.

**Pampasgrass, jubatagrass**  
(*Cortaderia selloana*, *Cortaderia jubata*)



Wind and water can carry the tiny seeds for miles. The massive size of each plant with its accumulated litter reduces wildlife habitat

and can create a serious fire and flood hazard. Riparian areas are particularly vulnerable to invasion and the damage caused by these plants.

**Giant reed/Arundo**  
(*Arundo donax*)



Photo by Joseph DiTomaso

An extremely fast-growing plant that grows in moist areas. *Arundo* spreads by root sprouts and stem sections, can cause erosion and displaces

desirable plants. Highly flammable and can burn even when green. Areas along creeks and streams are particularly vulnerable to invasion and the damage caused by this plant.

### TRY PLANTING THESE INSTEAD

**Deer grass**   
(*Muhlenbergia rigens*)



Clumping perennial grass growing up to 3 feet tall with 2 foot plumes rising about the plant. Native Americans use it

for making baskets. Other *Muhlenbergia* species can also be good choices.

**New Zealand flax**   
(*Phormium tenax*)



Chris Morris, San Luis Obispo Co. Dept. of Agriculture

Large, hardy, fast growing and requires minimal care. Many varieties available including striking stripes of red, yellow and green.

**Bamboo - clumping varieties only**  
(*Bambusa multiplex*)



Photo by Steve Green

Rhizomes of the clumping bamboo stay close to the plant, decreasing the ability to become invasive like the running bamboo

varieties. Dense growth forms good hedges and screens.

**California fescue**   
(*Festuca californica*)



Photo courtesy Santa Barbara Botanical Garden

Flowering stalks rise up to 5 feet above large clumped grass (2-3 foot tall) in late spring, early summer. Striking appearance, good adaptability, with clumps holding their shape well throughout the year.

**Blue oat grass**   
(*Helictotrichon sempervirens*)



Photo courtesy GardenSoft

Evergreen, bright blue-gray, narrow leaves in a fountain like clump. In spring, stems to 2 feet or taller rise above foliage, bearing straw-colored flower clusters.

**Also try:** California melic - native (*Melica californica*), giant wild rye (*Leymus condensatus*)

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Cal-IPC

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Cover photo by Wendy West. All photos from Cal-IPC unless otherwise noted.

## SHRUBS

### DO NOT PLANT! INVASIVE!

#### Broom – Scotch, French, Spanish

(*Cytisus scoparius*, *Genista monspessulana*, *Spartium junceum*)



Photo by Wendy West

Brooms have invaded over one million acres in California. The flowers produce thousands of seeds that build up in the soil over time. When the seeds germinate they create dense thickets of plants that obliterate entire plant and animal communities. Brooms also create a serious fire hazard in the Sierra Foothill region and in many areas throughout California. Note: Plants commonly known as “Sweet broom” (*Cytisus spachianus*, *Cytisus racemosus*, *Genista racemosa*, *Genista fragrans*) are currently not known to be invasive. However, because of the lack of information on their potential for invading beyond landscaped areas, we do not recommend them as a substitute for other brooms.

#### Scarlet wisteria, rattlebox

(*Sesbania punicea*)



Photo by Joseph DiTomaso

The plants form dense thickets along creeks and streams, choking out plants that provide wildlife forage and habitat. Seeds are moved from garden plantings not only by birds, but also by floating downstream in waterways.

### TRY PLANTING THESE INSTEAD

#### Forsythia ☀️💧💧

(*Forsythia species*)



© Monrovia

Often the first plant to bloom in spring, forsythia produces an astounding display of bright yellow flowers.

Dozens of cultivars available. Grows quickly.

#### Western redbud, ☀️🌑💧💧

Eastern redbud

(*Cercis occidentalis*,  
*Cercis canadensis*)



Photo by Joseph DiTomaso

Shrub or small tree, several trunks from base, rosy pink flowers in spring and interesting seed pods and foliage, which changes color throughout the seasons. Prefers well-drained soils. Western redbud is native to our region.

#### Potentilla ☀️🌑💧💧🌱

(*Potentilla fruticosa*)



Photo by Sue Donaldson

Shrubby potentilla, sometimes called cinquefoil, are fairly trouble-free plants that thrive in a variety of conditions.

Bright to dark green leaves; yellow flowers that bloom cheerfully from late spring through summer.

#### Toyon ☀️🌑💧🌱

(*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)



California native, evergreen shrub producing delicate flowers and large clusters of red berries that birds love!

#### Sticky monkey flower ☀️🌑💧🌱

(*Mimulus aurantiacus*)



Photo by Aaron Schusteff

Plants grow 1 to 4 feet tall, depending on growing conditions. Sticky green leaves, with yellow flowers blooming mid-summer to fall.

#### Strawberry tree ☀️🌑💧

(*Arbutus unedo*)



Photos by Bob Perry

Dark green, handsome, red-stemmed leaves, clusters of small white, urn-shaped flowers and round red fruit. Can be managed as either a shrub, with screening ability if left unpruned, or a tree.

## TREES

### DO NOT PLANT! INVASIVE!

#### Chinese tallow tree

(*Sapium sebiferum*)



Photo by Joseph DiTomaso

Chinese tallow trees are able to produce a large number of seeds and new shoots can sprout from roots. Seeds are dispersed by birds and in moving water, where they can remain viable for several weeks while floating. Wetlands, creeks, rivers and native plant habitat are particularly vulnerable to infestation by this tree.

#### Tree of heaven

(*Ailanthus altissima*)



Photo by Bill Frost

Although not commonly sold in nurseries, this tree is sometimes “shared” among gardeners because of its fast-growing, shade-producing characteristics. Tree of heaven is a prolific seed producer and easily resprouts from roots and stumps. Once established, this tree is very difficult to eliminate. Due to its extensive root system it is aggressive enough to cause damage to sewers, roadways, sidewalks, and building foundations.

#### Salt cedar/Tamarisk

(*Tamarix species*)



Photo by Joseph DiTomaso

A serious riparian invader throughout California. Uses excessive amounts of water, adds salt to the soil, changes water courses, diminishes wildlife habitat, and increases fire hazard. Not commonly sold, but occasionally available.

### TRY PLANTING THESE INSTEAD

#### Crape myrtle ☀️💧

(*Lagerstroemia species*)

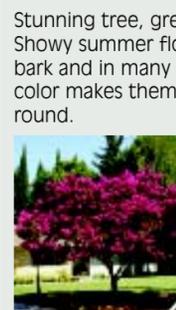


Photo by Steve Green

Stunning tree, great in a hot area. Showy summer flowers, good-looking bark and in many cases, brilliant fall color makes them attractive year round.

#### European white birch ☀️💧

(*Betula pendula*)



Upright main branches, weeping side branches with a delicate, lacy appearance. Average mature tree is 30-40 feet tall, spreading to half its height.

#### Mountain ash ☀️🌑💧💧

(*Sorbus species*, including native Greene’s mountain ash – *Sorbus scopulina*)



Valued for showy white flowers in clusters and orange to scarlet colored fruit. Foliage is typically finely cut, glossy green and some species have good fall color.

**Also try:** California black walnut – native (*Juglans californica hindsii*); White alder – native (*Alnus rhombifolia* for riparian or wet areas; Sawleaf zelkova (*Zelkova serrata*); Loquat (*Eriobotrya species*)

## Don't Plant or Share These Plants

These additional garden and pond plants have escaped into our local agricultural and wildlands. Although these may not be sold in local nurseries, some are available on the internet for purchase, and others are commonly “shared” among gardeners.

#### Water hyacinth

*Eichhornia crassipes*

Populations of this plant expand rapidly forming dense mats that clog waterways, alter water oxygen levels, provide mosquito habitat and displace native vegetation and habitat. Originally introduced as an aquatic ornamental.

#### Himalayan blackberry

*Rubus procerus*

Sprawling perennial vine that may expand 10 or more feet per year, smothering other plants. Identified easily by five leaflets grouped together to form each leaf.

#### Oblong spurge

*Euphorbia oblongata*

The plants form extensive creeping root systems, making the plant highly invasive. The milky white sap is toxic to humans, horses and cattle.



Oblong spurge. Photo by Bob Case

#### Dalmatian toadflax

*Linaria genistifolia* subspecies *dalmatica*

Reproduces by seed and from creeping roots. This plant, also known as “wild snapdragon” has been used as an ornamental but the invasive nature makes it a poor garden companion.



Dalmatian toadflax. Photo by Sue Donaldson

#### Perennial pepperweed/Tall whitetop

*Lepidium latifolium*

Out competes native vegetation and crops by reproducing from underground rhizomes, forming dense weedy plots. The dried flowers have been used as decoration but growing the plant is not worth the risk!

#### Purple loosestrife

*Lythrum salicaria*

Persists year to year from root buds and from the root crown. Erect stems, 2 to 4 feet tall, produce purple flowers on spikes. Although not commonly sold locally, this plant is available for purchase on the internet.

#### Sweet fennel

*Foeniculum vulgare*

Long cultivated for medicinal and edible uses, this plant has become widely escaped throughout the western hemisphere. Especially prevalent along roadsides.



Sweet fennel. Photos by Ken Owen

#### Foxglove

*Digitalis purpurea*

Foxglove has escaped cultivation to thrive in open and/or moist sites along roads and in forested areas in the Sierra Nevada foothill region. These plants produce abundant seed that have been reported to survive in the soil for up to 68 years!