

Unruly guests

If you do nothing else in your garden this year, exercise a bit of eco-wisdom by searching for and eliminating these alien invaders

It is estimated that there are approximately 27 000 indigenous species in South Africa and 9 000 foreign plant species that have been introduced to the country over the past few centuries. Of these 9 000 exotic or alien introductions, 348 have been identified as 'bad', ecologically damaging, invader plants.

Alien invader plants are those species that were introduced, either intentionally or unintentionally into the country and have now become naturalised. They are the varieties that threaten our rich biodiversity by replacing indigenous and endemic vegetation. This results in a loss of the insect species that are dependent on these plants causing a ripple-effect loss of the birds, reptiles and mammals that feed on those insects. They invade land better used for crops and livestock grazing and are often poisonous to man or animals.

Eco-friendly gardeners are endeavouring to rid their gardens of any designated invader plants that have been identified as a danger to the country's local ecosystems by environmentalists and weed scientists.

ACTION AGAINST INVADERS

Seedlings of many of these plant species appear in gardens all the time, courtesy of birds passing through. Get to know these plants and be on the lookout for them so that you can pull them out before they mature and start to set seeds in your garden. In the case of trees, this will eliminate the need for costly tree felling at a later stage.

Another key factor in eradicating these plants is that the roots have to be eliminated to prevent the plants from re-growing. This can either be done mechanically by digging the root ball out or chemically by applying a tree and shrub killing chemical to the stump.

SOURCES

Working for Water Nurseries Partnership Programme
011 723 9000
For more information, visit www.lifeisagarden.co.za,
www.agis.agric.za/wip or www.dwaf.gov.za/wfw

THE 10 WORST CATEGORY-1 INVASIVE ALIEN PLANTS

OPPOSITE PAGE: 1 Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*). This poisonous 3m tall shrub which flowers from August to November has invaded fynbos, roadsides, urban open spaces and wasteland.

2 Cat's claw creeper (*Macfadyena unguis-cati*). This invasive climber flowers from September until February. An attempt is being made to control it with the release of a beetle that lives specifically off its leaves.

3 Bugweed (*Solanum mauritianum*). This is one of the worst invaders, both in gardens and in the countryside. It's spread by various birds, buck and monkeys depositing its seeds after eating the fruits.

4 Lantana (*Lantana camara*). This poisonous plant varies in growth from a compact shrub to an untidy scrambler 3m high. Its blooms can be white, pink, red, crimson, orange or yellow.

5 Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*). This tall grass reaches 3m.

6 Indian shot (*Canna indica*). This invades stream banks and moist sites in the warmer parts of the country. The more showy hybrid cultivars that don't set seeds are permitted.

7 Water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*). This aquatic plant has escaped from garden ponds and is invading dams, pans and slow-moving rivers in subtropical regions.

8 Ginger lilies (*Hedychium species*). The red (*H. coccineum*), white (*H. coronarium*) and yellow (*H. flavescens*) ginger lilies and the Kahli ginger lily (*H. gardnerianum*), that have been grown in frost-free gardens have invaded moist, shaded sites, forests and river banks.

9 Oleander (*Nerium oleander*). This Mediterranean shrub with pink, red or white blooms with a single row of petals has spread into watercourses, particularly rocky ones in semi-arid mountain valleys. The double-flowered forms which have seeds that are sterile are permitted.

10 Fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*). This tussock-forming grass has invaded roadsides and sites of soil disturbance throughout the country. The sterile cultivar, purple fountain grass (*P. setaceum* 'Rubrum') can still be planted. **GMH**



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