



Alien Plant Invaders: A Growing Problem

Salt Spring Island has ideal growing conditions for a wide variety of plants from many parts of the world, which makes gardening here a joy. However, some non-native species that are sown or planted in our region have few or no natural pests or predators and become invasive.

Invasive plants are alien species that have the potential to create undesirable or detrimental impacts on humans, animals or ecosystems. Invasive plants grow rapidly, spread quickly, are tolerant of tough conditions and can form dense patches. They may displace native species and disrupt natural ecological processes in parks and natural areas. Many plants that are easy to manage (or even hard to grow) in other regions can flourish here and quickly get out of control as they become aggressive invaders in our mild climate.

World-wide, invasive species are the second most significant threat to biodiversity (topped only by habitat loss) and seriously upset natural plant communities. They can cost economies millions of dollars as they invade range, pasture and forest lands and impair recreational landscapes and water quality.

While you may be managing some invasive plants within your property, they can easily spread to natural areas beyond and create significant problems. It is also important to consider what may happen if you move away or become less able to continually control them in the future.

Here is how you can help stop the spread of invasive plants:

- Grow native plants in your gardens—they are naturally adapted to the local environment and non-invasive.
- Learn to identify species that are invasive in your area, and do not purchase or grow them. See the SSI Conservancy web pages on Invasive Species for more detailed information and links to other information resources.
- If you see invasive species for sale in nurseries, ask the manager to stop selling them.
- Be suspicious of non-native plants that are promoted as “fast spreaders’ or “vigorous self-seeders”.
- Consider removing invasive plants and replacing them with non-invasive alternatives.
- Clip off spent flowers, seedpods and berries of known invasive plants to prevent reproduction and stop their spread to other areas by birds, animals and people.
- Carefully dispose of yard waste and hanging baskets into a properly functioning compost pile or by drying them out sufficiently to kill the tops and roots. Put seeds of invasive species into the garbage.
- Use wildflower seed mixes with caution as many contain species that may be invasive in your location. Read the label.
- Contain creeping plants by growing them in containers. Be wary of “ground-covers”.
- Discourage propagation of invasive species by friends and neighbours. Talk with them about the impacts of invasive plants and the use of suitable alternatives. Trade only non-invasive plants and seeds.
- Avoid spreading seeds of flowers from roadsides and other disturbed areas as these are often invasive species.

- Clean footwear, equipment, tools and vehicles before leaving an area that is infested with invasive plants. Many parks and nature reserves have been infested by seeds unknowingly brought in by hikers and visitors.
- Contribute to local efforts to manage invasive plants in other areas of the community.

Southern British Columbia’s “13 Most Unwanted Garden Plants” and some good alternatives

The following list is based on the pamphlet “Grow Me Instead”, published by the Invasive Plant Council of B.C.

- Butterfly Bush** (*Buddleia davidii*) - Instead grow Red-flowering Currant, California Lilac or Oceanspray
- Common Periwinkle** (*Vinca minor*) - Instead grow Wild Ginger, Piggy-back Plant or Christmas Box
- English Holly** (*Ilex aquifolium*) – Instead grow Tall Oregon Grape, Holly-Leafed Osmanthus or San Jose Holly
- English and Irish Ivy** (*Hedera helix and H. hibernica*)– Instead grow Salal, Deer Fern or Barrenwort
- Giant Hogweed** (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) – Instead grow Blue Elderberry, Rodgersia, or Ornamental Rhubarb
- Himalayan Blackberry** (*Rubus armeniacus*)– Instead grow Thimbleberry, Black Huckleberry, Marionberry or Boysenberry
- Knotweeds** (*Fallopia japonica, F. sachalinensis and F. x bohemica*) – Instead grow False Solomon’s Seal, Joe Pye Weed or Bugbane
- Policeman’s Helmet /Himalayan Balsam** (*Impatiens glandulifera*)– Instead grow Meadow Rue, Pacific Bleeding Heart or Kirengeshoma
- Purple Loosestrife** (*Lythrum salicaria*)– Instead grow Garden Astilbe/False Spirea, Anise Hyssop or Cardinal Flower
- Scotch Broom** (*Cytisus scoparius*) – Instead grow Yellow/Pontic Azalea, Warminster Broom or Nootka Rose
- Spurge Laurel/Daphne** (*Daphne laureola*) – Instead grow Evergreen Huckleberry, Fragrant Sweet Box or Oregon Grape
- Yellow Flag Iris** (*Iris pseudacorus*) – Instead grow Oregon Iris, Western Blue Iris or Siberian Iris
- Yellow Archangel/Lamium** (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*) – Instead grow Foam Flower, Redwood Sorrel or Coral Bells

For Gardeners on Salt Spring Island

A resource binder of information about invasive plants in gardens has been prepared for the SSI Garden Club lending library by the SSIC Stewardship Committee.