A Homeowner's Guide to Common Invasive Plants

Oregon is a wonderful place to garden. The mild conditions allow gardeners to plant a variety of plants from around the world. Unfortunately, there are a few plants used in gardens and landscapes that can cause serious harm to the natural environment by "jumping the fence" and spreading elsewhere.

What's the Big Deal?

Invasive plants can threaten water quality and wildlife, change stream flows, increase erosion, compete with crops, and increase fire hazards. Some invasive plants are considered "noxious weeds" and are prohibited in Oregon.

This guidebook will help you identify invasive plants found in our area and provide alternatives for you to plant. You can choose a native alternative or an ornamental (non-native, but not invasive, commonly found at garden centers). For more information on using natives in your landscape refer to the "Homeowner's Guide to Naturescaping."

There are no exact substitutes for invasive plants, so check the characteristics of any alternative you are considering growing to ensure it will grow in your conditions. One of the reasons certain plants tend to become invasive is because they can tolerate a wide range of conditions. For example, English ivy is a groundcover and a vine, grows in full sun and full shade, tolerates drought, and is hardy well below freezing. So a suitable replacement will depend on the specific conditions where "your" ivy is growing.

If you already have invasive plants in your garden:

- Remove the invasives and replace them with suitable non-invasive plants.
- Dead-head (remove flowering heads and seeds) so plants do not release seed.
- Disposal-Dry invasives out on a tarp, then bag and place in the trash. (Composting does not kill some plants and seeds.)

English ivy can kill an otherwise healthy tree.

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Check out the other booklets in the Homeowner's series: Naturescaping, Rain Gardens, and Rainwater Harvesting.

Armenian (Himalayan) blackberry

Rubus armeniacus

Can form dense impenetrable thickets in moist forests, riverbanks, near ponds, wetlands, and drainage ways. Common along roadsides and can dominate range and pasturelands.

Identification: Shrubby dense thickets of long bending branches that appear as 8 feet tall mounds or banks. Leaves usually with 5 large, oval leaflets that are dark green on top and grayish-green on bottom. Showy flowers are white-pink. Yields juicy, black, edible berries.

Notes:

- Spreads by seeds, root sprouts, and by branch tips that root.

Armenian blackberry

Alternatives*

Natives

Salmonberry: full sun, moist, deciduous

Thimbleberry: shade, moist, deciduous

Ornamentals

Marionberry: full sun, moist, deciduous

Red raspberry: full sun, moist, deciduous

*Note: Berry vines can become invasive if not maintained.

Bittersweet nightshade

Solanum dulcamara

Invades edges of fields, roadsides, open disturbed areas, streambanks, and wetlands. Forms a dense, tangled mass over other vegetation.

Identification: Perennial vine or sprawling shrub with woody lower stems. Purple, star-shaped flowers with backward pointing petals and a prominent yellow center. Flower grow in clusters. Bright red berries when ripe. Crushed leaves and stem have unpleasant odor.

Notes:

- Spreads by broken stem fragments and by seeds.
- All parts of the plant are toxic to humans and animals.

Bittersweet nightshade

Alternatives

Natives

Snowberry: full sun to shade, moist to dry, deciduous

Swamp rose: full sun to shade, wet to moist, deciduous

Ornamentals

Columbine: full sun to partial shade, moist to dry, deciduous

Bell flower: full sun, moist, deciduous

Butterfly bush

Buddleia davidii

Forms crowded stands along riverbanks, open forest, and pastures.

Identification:

Shrub to about 10 feet tall with arching branches and dense clusters of showy flowers. Flowers are 4-petaled, tubular at base, and white to pink to purple. Leaves are velvety, lance-shaped and gray-green in color.

Notes:

- Spreads by broken stem fragments and by seed.

Butterfly bush

Alternatives

Natives

Red-flowering currant: partial sun, moist, deciduous

Blue elderberry: full to partial sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Ornamentals

Meyer lilac: full sun, dry, evergreen

Weigela varieties: full sun to partial shade, moist, deciduous

English holly

Ilex aquifolium

Can occur in pristine to highly disturbed coniferous forests, in forest gaps, and along edges of wetlands.

Identification:

Evergreen shrub or small tree to 20 feet tall. Leaves are thick and spiny or prickly along the edges. May bear bright red berries.

Notes:

- Birds and small mammals eat berries and disperse seeds.
- Berries are toxic to humans.

English holly

Alternatives

Natives

Pacific waxmyrtle: full sun, dry, evergreen

Oregon grape: full sun, moist, evergreen

Ornamentals

Firethorn: full sun to partial shade, moist, evergreen

Strawberry tree: full sun to partial shade, moist, evergreen

English ivy

Hedera helix

Invades forests, especially near urban areas. Can form a thick canopy layer that carpets forest understory, climbs and smothers trees, encourages tree rot, makes tree canopy heavier and more susceptible to wind damage, and increases fire hazards.

Identification: Vigorous woody perennial with leaves that are usually 3-lobed. Juvenile form remains as creeping vine.

Notes:

- Stem fragments can regenerate if left in soil.

English ivy

Alternatives

Natives

Kinnikinnick: full to partial sun, dry, evergreen

Wood strawberry: shade, dry, evergreen

Ornamentals

Creeping juniper: full sun, dry, evergreen

Star jasmine: full to partial sun, moist, evergreen

European hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna

Also known as Oneseed or English hawthorn. Invades forests, riverbanks, oak woodlands, disturbed grasslands, and pastures.

Identification:

Deciduous shrub or small tree to 15 feet tall with smooth, pale gray bark. Leaves are 3-lobed, flowers are white and showy, dark red berries with one seed. Branches with stout thorns up to 1 inch long.

Notes:

- Birds consume berries and disperse seeds.

European hawthorn

Alternatives

Natives

Douglas hawthorn: full to partial sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Mock orange: full to partial sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Ornamentals

Lavalle hawthorn: full sun, dry, deciduous

Flowering crabapple: full sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Sweet fennel

Foeniculum vulgare

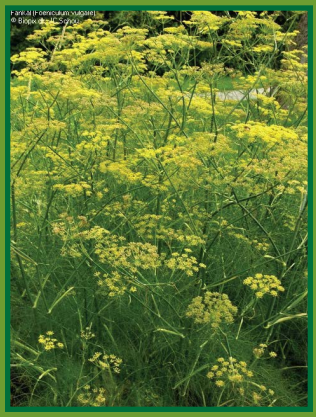
Can develop dense uniform stands in grasslands, pastures, creekbanks, old fields, ditches, roadsides, and in open lots.

Identification: Aromatic perennial up to 6 feet tall with finely dissected grayish-green feathery leaves. Tiny yellow flowers clustered into umbrella-shaped groups. Base is non-bulb forming.

Notes:

- Bulb-forming varieties of fennel are non-invasive.
- Seeds can be dispersed by birds and rodents.

Sweet fennel



Alternatives

Natives

Yarrow: full sun, dry, deciduous

Douglas aster: full sun, moist, deciduous

Ornamentals

Cosmos: full sun, dry, deciduous

Annual sunflowers: full sun, moist, deciduous

Jewelweed

Impatiens glandulifera

Also known as Policeman's helmet. Can form dense thickets in lowland forests, riverbanks and streamsides, and along roads.

Identification:

Annual up to 5 feet tall with succulent purple-tinged stems that are easily broken. Attractive pink-to-purple flowers with short spur at the base.

Notes:

- Contains explosive seeds pods.
- Has become very invasive in parts of Britain (climate similar to PNW).

Jewelweed

Alternatives

Natives

Wild bleeding heart: partial sun, moist, deciduous

Black twinberry: full sun to shade, moist, deciduous

Ornamentals

Cardinal flower: full to partial sun, wet to moist, deciduous

New England aster: full sun, wet to dry, deciduous

Knotweeds

Polygonum cuspidatum, Polygonum sachalinense

Japanese, Giant, and Himalayan knotweeds invade riverbanks and open disturbed areas. Can form large, dense stands that degrade streamside habitat for salmon and other wildlife.

Identification: Feathery white to cream colored flowers. Bamboo-like hollow stems up to 10 feet tall, often with purple speckles. Stems have distinctive reddish-brown papery sheath at joints.

Notes:

- Spreads primarily by broken stem fragments that are easily dispersed by flowing water.

Knotweed

Alternatives

Natives

Red osier dogwood: full sun to partial shade, moist, deciduous

Oceanspray: full to partial sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Ornamentals

Virginia sweetspire: sun to shade, wet, deciduous

Dappled willow: full sun to partial shade, wet to moist, deciduous

Morning glory (bindweeds)

Convolvulus species

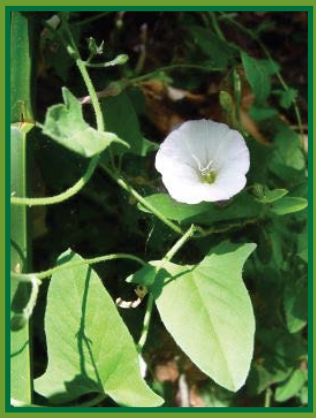
Invades forests, farm and range lands, ditches, and other open areas. Starts as a ground cover until it reaches plants or other structures then climbs aggressively.

Identification: Perennial vine with smooth, arrow-shaped leaves. Slender, twining stems that grow up to 6 feet long. Pink to white trumpet flowers.

Notes:

- Becomes very invasive in gardens and lawns.
- Also in a larger hedge variety.

Morning glory



Alternatives

Natives

Piggyback plant: partial to full shade, moist, deciduous

Fringecup: Partial sun to shade, moist, evergreen

Ornamentals

Black eyed susan varieties: full sun to partial shade, moist to dry, deciduous

Scarlet runner bean: full sun, moist, deciduous

Purple loosestrife

Lythrum salicaria

Invades wetlands, wet prairies, meadows; and shorelines of lakes, streams, rivers, ditches, and canals. Can survive in drier gardens with irrigation. Extensive stands can restrict water flow, and impede irrigation.

Identification: Perennial, up to 8 feet tall with showy pink-purple spikes and angular stems. Flowers usually have 5-7 petals with small yellow center.

Notes:

- Spreads from broken stems and seeds dispersed by wind and water.
- Each plant can produce as many as 100,000 seeds per year.

Purple loosestrife

Alternatives

Natives

Douglas spirea: full to partial sun, wet to moist, deciduous

Common camas: full sun, moist, deciduous

Ornamentals

Spike speedwell: full sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Bee balm: full to partial sun, wet to moist, deciduous

Purple pampas grass

Cortaderia jubata

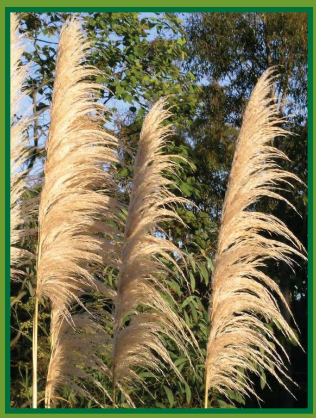
Also known as Jubata grass. Can form dense stands and create substantial fire hazard in dunes, disturbed grasslands, forest gaps, and thinned forest.

Identification: Large, clump-forming grass up to 8 feet tall. Large showy flower plumes can be purple-tinged to tawny in color. Leaves are coarse.

Notes:

- Large plant clumps can produce more than one million seeds per year.
- Sharp leaves can cut skin and hands.
- All plants are female and can develop viable seed without fertilization.

Purple pampas grass



Alternatives

Natives

Tufted hairgrass: full sun, wet, deciduous

Blue wildrye: full to partial sun, dry, deciduous

Ornamentals

Deergrass: full sun to partial shade, dry, evergreen

New Zealand flax: full sun to partial shade, moist to dry, evergreen

Scotch (Scot's) broom

Cytisus scoparius

Invades grasslands, prairies, pasture and rangelands, roadsides, and sand dunes. Scotch broom changes soil nutrients and creates fire hazards.

Identification:

Shrub to about 6 feet tall with green stems, small green leaves, and pea-like bright yellow flowers.

Notes:

- Seeds can survive in soil up to 50 years.
- Flowers and seeds are toxic to humans and most livestock.

Scotch broom

Alternatives

Natives

Oregon grape: full sun, moist, evergreen

Indian plum: full sun to shade, moist, deciduous

Ornamentals

Forsythia hybrids: full sun, moist, deciduous

Winter jasmine: full sun to shade, moist, deciduous

St. Johnswort (common)

Hypericum perforatum

Not to be confused with the ornamental St. Johnswort found in gardens. Generally found in open lots, range land and pastures, and along roadsides.

Identification:

Perennial up to 4 feet with narrow, lance-shaped leaves.
Flowers are yellow with 5 petals.

Notes:

- Toxic to livestock.

St. Johnswort (common)

Alternatives

Natives

Wood violet: Partial sun to shade, moist, deciduous

Oregon sunshine: full sun, dry, evergreen foliage

Ornamentals

Coreopsis varieties: full to partial sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Marigolds: full to partial sun, moist to dry, deciduous

Tree of heaven(stinking sumac)

Ailanthus altissima

Invades riverbanks and open disturbed sites such as roadsides, and forest edges. Can form large, dense thickets in urban areas too, including open lots and railroad beds.

Identification: Tall tree up to 80 feet with smooth gray bark and compound leaves. Leaves up to 4 feet long generally made up of 11-41 leaflets per leaf. Clustered flowers are yellow-pink. Fruits are papery-winged with single seed in center. Tree has a bad odor, especially if a leaf or stem is crushed.

Notes:

- Root sprouts can form large, dense colonies.

Tree of heaven

Alternatives

Natives	Ornamentals
Bigleaf maple: full to partial sun, moist, deciduous	Autumn purple ash: full sun, moist to dry, deciduous
Oregon ash: full to partial sun, moist, deciduous	Japanese tree lilac: full sun to partial shade, moist to dry, deciduous

Vinca (periwinkle)

Vinca major, Vinca minor

Spreads rapidly with a dense, intertwining root system that can choke out native plants and dominate an understory. Poisonous if ingested.

Identification: Trailing shrub with stems growing 1 to 3 feet long or low trailing ground cover 3 to 6 inches tall with thin, wiry stems. Produces a solitary five-petal violet flower at the end of the stem.

Notes:

- Sold at many local garden centers and nurseries. Don't plant this pest!

Vinca

Alternatives

Natives

Bunchberry: full to partial sun, moist, evergreen

Wild ginger: partial sun to shade, moist, evergreen

Ornamentals

Candytuft: full to partial sun, moist, evergreen

Heather varieties: full to partial sun, moist, evergreen

Yellow flag iris

Iris pseudacorus

Invades freshwater and brackish wetlands, and shorelines of lakes, streams, rivers, ditches, and canals. Dense mats can trap sediment creating higher, drier land.

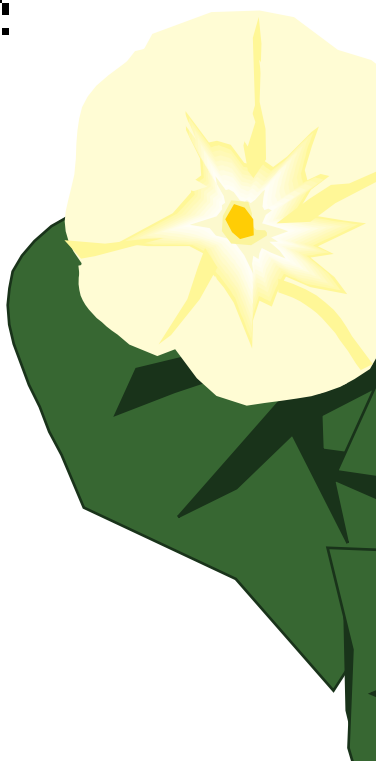
Identification: Perennial to 5 feet tall with thick swordlike leaves and several yellow to cream-colored flowers per stem.

Notes:

- Spreads by broken stem fragments and by seeds that float in water.
- All parts of the plant are toxic to humans and animals.

Yellow flag iris

Alternatives

Natives	Ornamentals
Douglas iris: full sun, moist, deciduous	Japanese iris: full sun, wet to moist, deciduous
Monkey flower: shade, wet to moist, deciduous	Siberian iris: full to partial sun, moist, deciduous

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