

Alternatives to Invasive Plants Commonly Found in North Florida Landscapes¹

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Invasive plants are non-native plants that form expanding populations in natural areas and other plant communities with which they were not previously associated. Once escaped, they can cause ecological impacts, such as displacing native plants and associated wildlife or altering natural water flow and fire patterns. Standardized invasive plant terminology set forth by members of the UF/IFAS Invasive Species Council can be a useful reference for other related terms such as “introduced,” “established,” and “nuisance” (Iannone et al., 2021).

Some ornamentals listed as invasive by the University of Florida [IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas](#) or by the [Florida Invasive Species Council](#) (FISC) are still in commercial production and widely found in Florida landscapes. Homeowners might replace invasive plants if non-invasive alternatives are researched, publicized, and made readily available. By shifting production and use from invasive ornamentals to native or non-invasive cultivars, the nursery and landscape industry may benefit from potential revenue while fostering greater collaboration with state agencies and environmental groups.

University of Florida research, teaching, and Extension efforts over the last 25 years have focused on identifying alternatives to ornamental invasives by assessing similar traits of [Florida-Friendly Landscaping™](#) plants, related genera, and their cultivars. University of Florida horticulturists have identified native species with ornamental and ecological appeal as substitutes (Wilson, 2020). An easy-to-use flipbook where invasives are paired with landscape alternatives has been developed by Extension agents, faculty, and students (Parrish et al., 2023). Likewise, University of Florida ornamental plant breeders have played a key role in creating, selecting, and trialing new sterile, non-invasive cultivars (Wilson and Deng, 2023). This breeding initiative now has a national reach (Contreras et al., 2025). Table 1 lists native and non-native ornamentals as alternatives to invasive plants

commonly used in Florida landscapes. Only plants considered to be generally available in the nursery trade are listed. Alternative plants are similar to respective invasive plants as much as possible in terms of size, habit, texture, flowering, fruiting, and moisture preference. Introduced plants listed in Table 1 were determined to be non-invasive (with assessments of “not a problem species” or “may be used with caution”) by the [IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas](#), or have not yet been evaluated. For more information, please see the [Florida -Friendly Landscaping™ App](#) for an interactive guide to selecting the right plant with the right place.

References

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Table 1. Invasive ornamentals commonly found in north Florida landscapes with commonly available native and non-native substitutes. Scientific names are those used by the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas, the U.S. National Plant Germplasm System, and the Atlas of Florida Plants by the Institute for Systematic Biology.

Invasive ornamental ²		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute
Scientific name	Common name		
<i>Albizia julibrissin</i>	Mimosa	<i>Cercis canadensis</i> , Eastern redbud <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> , Fringe tree <i>Prunus umbellata</i> , Chickasaw plum <i>Vachellia farnesiana</i> , Sweet acacia	<i>Aloysia virgata</i> , Sweet almondshrub <i>Lagerstroemia indica</i> , Crape myrtle
<i>Ardisia crenata</i>	Coral ardisia	<i>Ilex glabra</i> , Gallberry <i>Ilex vomitoria</i> (dwarf cultivars), Dwarf yaupon holly	<i>Ilex cornuta</i> , Chinese holly <i>Osmanthus heterophyllus</i> , False holly
<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i>	Camphor tree	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> , Southern magnolia <i>Magnolia virginiana</i> , Sweet bay <i>Persea borbonia</i> , Red bay <i>Quercus geminata</i> , Sand live oak <i>Quercus virginiana</i> , Live oak <i>Ulmus alata</i> , Winged elm	<i>Ulmus parvifolia</i> , Lacebark elm, Chinese elm <i>Lagerstroemia indica</i> , Crape myrtle <i>Elaeocarpus decipiens</i> , Japanese blueberry tree
<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Elephant ear	<i>Canna flaccida</i> , Golden canna <i>Pontederia cordata</i> , Pickerelweed <i>Sagittaria latifolia</i> , Arrowhead <i>Crinum americanum</i> , Florida swamp lily	<i>Alocasia macrorrhizos</i> , Giant taro <i>Xanthosoma aurea</i> 'Lime Zinger', Lime Zinger elephant ear <i>Begonia nelumbiifolia</i> , Lotus-leaf begonia <i>Caladium × hortulanum</i> , Caladium <i>Canna × generalis</i> , Canna lily <i>Hedychium coronarium</i> , Butterfly ginger <i>Philodendron bipinnatifidum</i> , Selloum philodendron <i>Zingiber zerumbet</i> , Pinecone ginger
<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i>	Air-potato	<i>Ipomoea alba</i> , Moonflower <i>Passiflora suberosa</i> , Corky-stem passionvine <i>Bignonia capreolata</i> , Cross vine	<i>Bignonia callistegioides</i> , Painted trumpet vine (See <i>Gardening Solutions for Florida</i> , https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/vines , for additional vines.)

Invasive ornamental ²		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute
Scientific name	Common name		
<i>Lantana strigocamara</i>	Lantana, shrub verbenas	<i>Helianthus debilis</i> , Beach sunflower <i>Salvia coccinea</i> , Tropical sage, red salvia <i>Lantana involucrata</i> , Button sage <i>Rosa palustris</i> , Swamp rose	<i>Evolvulus glomeratus</i> subsp. <i>grandiflorus</i> , Blue daze <i>Lantana strigocamara</i> 'UF-1011-2', Bloomify™ Rose lantana (sterile) <i>Lantana strigocamara</i> 'UF-1013A-2A', Bloomify™ Red lantana (sterile) <i>Lantana strigocamara</i> 'UF-1013-1', Lucious royal red zone lantana (sterile) <i>Rosa</i> × 'RADrazz', Knock Out™ rose <i>Salvia greggii</i> , Autumn sage <i>Salvia splendens</i> , Scarlet sage
<i>Ligustrum sinense</i>	Chinese privet	<i>Agarista populifolia</i> , Florida leucothoe <i>Ilex glabra</i> , Gallberry, inkberry <i>Illicium floridanum</i> , Florida anise <i>Illicium parviflorum</i> , Star anise <i>Itea virginica</i> , Virginia sweetspire <i>Viburnum obovatum</i> , Walter's viburnum <i>Forestiera segregata</i> , Wild olive	<i>Camellia japonica</i> , Japanese camellia <i>Camellia sasanqua</i> , Sasanqua camellia <i>Feijoa sellowiana</i> , Feijoa or pineapple guava <i>Gardenia jasminoides</i> , Gardenia <i>Ilex</i> × 'Nellie R. Stevens', Nellie Stevens holly <i>Ilex cornuta</i> , Chinese holly <i>Leucophyllum frutescens</i> , Texas sage <i>Viburnum odoratissimum</i> , Sweet viburnum <i>Viburnum odoratissimum</i> var. <i>awabuki</i> , Awabuki viburnum <i>Viburnum suspensum</i> , Sandankwa viburnum <i>Ligustrum quihoui</i> , Waxleaf privet
<i>Lonicera japonica</i>	Japanese honeysuckle	<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i> , Carolina jessamine <i>Lonicera sempervirens</i> , Coral honeysuckle <i>Bignonia capreolata</i> , Cross vine	<i>Callerya reticulata</i> , Evergreen wisteria <i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i> , Confederate jasmine (See <i>Gardening Solutions for Florida</i> https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/vines , for additional vines.)
<i>Melaleuca viminalis</i>	Weeping bottlebrush	<i>Vachellia farnesiana</i> , Sweet acacia <i>Prunus umbellata</i> , Chickasaw plum <i>Hamelia patens</i> , Firebush <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> , Fringe tree <i>Ilex vomitoria</i> 'Pendula', Weeping yaupon holly	<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i> , Crape myrtle <i>Vitex agnus-castus</i> , Chastetree

Invasive ornamental ^z		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute
Scientific name	Common name		
<i>Nandina domestica</i> (species type or wild type)	Nandina, heavenly bamboo	<i>Agarista populifolia</i> , Florida leucothoe <i>Itea virginica</i> , Virginia sweetspire <i>Clethra alnifolia</i> , Sweet pepperbush <i>Ilex glabra</i> , Gall berry <i>Hamelia patens</i> , Firebush	<i>Mahonia bealei</i> , Leatherleaf mahonia <i>Mahonia fortunei</i> , Fortune's mahonia <i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Firepower', Firepower nandina (sterile) <i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Firestorm', Firestorm nandina (sterile) <i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Monfar', Sienna Sunrise nandina (sterile) <i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Harbour Dwarf', Harbour Dwarf nandina (sterile) <i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Blush Pink', Blush Pink nandina (sterile)
<i>Ruellia simplex</i>	Mexican petunia	<i>Silphium asteriscus</i> , Starry rosinweed <i>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</i> , Blue-eyed grass <i>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</i> , Blue porterweed, Jamaican snakeweed <i>Stokesia laevis</i> , Stokes' aster <i>Trichostema dichotomum</i> , Blue curls <i>Vernonia gigantea</i> , Giant ironweed <i>Helianthus angustifolius</i> , Narrowleaf sunflower (same spreading habit and moisture tolerance)	<i>Eranthemum pulchellum</i> , Blue sage <i>Plectranthus</i> x 'Mona Lavender', Mona Lavender plectranthus <i>Plumbago auriculata</i> , Plumbago <i>Ruellia simplex</i> , 'Purple Showers', 'Purple Showers' Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R10-105-Q54', Mayan Pink Mexican petunia (sterile) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R10-102', Mayan Purple Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R10-108', Mayan White Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R12-2-1', Mayan Compact Purple Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R15-24-17', Aztec Pink/White Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R16-1-1', Aztec Pink Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Ruellia simplex</i> 'R15-3-1', Aztec Purple Mexican petunia (sterile, use with caution) <i>Salvia farinacea</i> , Mealycup sage <i>Salvia greggii</i> , Autumn sage <i>Salvia leucantha</i> , Mexican sage

^z As listed by the UF/IFAS Status Assessment.

^y Non-invasive cultivar approved for use as determined by the UF/IFAS Intraspecific Taxon Protocol (Lieurance, Deah and S. Luke Flory, 2024). SS-AGR-371/376.

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