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Alternatives to Invasive Plants Commonly Found in Central Florida Landscapes[1]

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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 (McIntyre et al., 2022, 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.

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Table 1. Invasive ornamentals commonly found in central Florida landscapes and commonly available native and non-native, non-invasive 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[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[y]
Scientific name	**Common name**		
Albizia julibrissin	Mimosa, Silk tree	*Ardisia escallonioides*, Marlberry *Cercis canadensis*, Eastern redbud *Chionanthus virginicus*, Fringe tree *Hamelia patens,* Firebush *Prunus umbellata*, Chickasaw plum, flatwoods plum *Vachellia farnesiana*, Sweet acacia	*Aloysia virgata,* Sweet almondshrub *Calliandra haematocephala,* Powderpuff *Handroanthus heptaphyllus (*formerly *Tabebuia heptaphylla),* Pink trumpet tree *Jatropha integerrima*, Peregrina (cold tender) *Lagerstroemia indica*, Crapemyrtle *Tabebuia impetiginosa*, Purple tabebuia, purple trumpet tree
Ardisia crenata	Coral ardisia	*Ilex glabra*, Gallberry, inkberry *Ilex vomitoria* (dwarf cultivars), Dwarf yaupon holly *Psychotria nervosa,* Wild coffee *Ardisia escallonioides*, Marlberry *Psychotria tenuifolia*, Velvet leaf wild coffee	*Ilex cornuta*, Chinese holly *Osmanthus heterophyllus*, False holly
Begonia cucullata	Wax or club begonia	*Amsonia ciliata*, Fringed bluestar *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, Eastern bluestar *Peperomia obtusifolia*, Florida peperomia *Phlox divaricata*, Woodland phlox *Gaillardia aestivalis,* Lanceleaf blanketflower	*Begonia* × *semperflorens-coltorum,* wax begonia *Begonia* ×, hybrid wax begonia *Portulaca grandiflora*, Moss rose *Calibrachoa* ×, Superbells, calibrachoa
Casuarina equisetifolia	Australian pine, Horsetail casuarina	*Juniperus virginiana*, Red cedar *Pinus* palustris, Longleaf pine *Quercus geminata,* Sand live oak *Taxodium distichum* var. *distichum,* Baldcypress *Taxodium distichum* var. *imbricarium,* Pondcypress	*Juniperus chinensis* 'Torulosa', Torulosa juniper, Chinese juniper *Platycladus orientalis,* Arborvitae, Oriental arborvitae *Podocarpus macrophyllus*, Podocarpus, Japanese yew

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[y]
Scientific name	**Common name**		
Cinnamomum camphora	Camphor tree	*Ilex cassine,* Dahoon holly, dahoon *Magnolia grandiflora*, Southern magnolia *Magnolia virginiana*, Sweet bay, swamp bay *Persea borbonia*, Red bay *Quercus virginiana*, Live oak *Ulmus alata,* Winged elm	*Ulmus parvifolia*, Chinese elm, lacebark elm *Lagerstroemia indica*, Crapemyrtle *Elaeocarpus decipiens*, Japanese blueberry tree
Colocasia esculenta	Elephant ear, Wild taro	*Canna flaccida*, Golden canna *Pontederia cordata*, Pickerelweed *Sagittaria latifolia*, Arrowhead *Crinum americanum*, Florida swamp-lily *Hymenocallis latifolia*, Mangrove spider-lily	*Alocasia macrorrhizos*, Elephant ear *Alpinia zerumbet*, Shell ginger, shell flower *Begonia nelumbiifolia*, Lotus-leaf begonia *Caladium × hortulanum*, Caladium *Canna × generalis*, Canna lily *Hedychium coronarium*, Butterfly ginger *Philodendron bipinnatifidum*, Selloum philodendron *Strelitzia reginae*, Bird-of-paradise *Zingiber zerumbet*, Pine cone ginger, pine cone lily
Dioscorea bulbifera	Air potato	*Ipomoea alba*, Moonflower *Passiflora suberosa* , Corky-stem passionvine	*Aristolochia maxima*, Florida Dutchman's pipe (See *Gardening Solutions for Florida*) for additional vines
Koelreuteria elegrans subsp. *formosana*	Golden rain tree	*Zanthoxylum fagara*, Wild lime *Vachellia farnesiana*, Sweet acacia *Aesculus pavia*, Red buckeye	*Handroanthus chrysotrichus,* Golden trumpet tree *Vitex agnus-castus,* Chastetree *Cassia fistula,* Golden shower tree *Lagerstroemia indica,* Crapemyrtle

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[y]
Scientific name	**Common name**		
Lantana strigocamara	Lantana, Shrub verbena	*Helianthus debilis,* Beach sunflower *Lantana depressa* var. *depressa,* Pineland lantana, rockland shrubverbena *Lantana involucrata,* Wild sage *Salvia coccinea*, Tropical sage, red salvia *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*, Blue porterweed, Jamaican snakeweed *Lycium carolinianum*, Christmasberry	*Argyranthemum frutescens*, Marguerite daisy *Cuphea ignea*, Cigar flower *Evolvulus glomeratus* subsp. *grandiflorus*, Blue daze *Lantana strigocamara* 'UF-1011-2'[x], Bloomify™ Rose lantana (sterile) *Lantana strigocamara* 'UF-1013A-2A'[x], Bloomify™ Red lantana (sterile) *Lantana strigocamara* 'UF-1013-1'), Luscious® royale red zone lantana (sterile) *Rosa ×'RADrazz',* Knock Out™ rose *Salvia greggii*, Autumn sage
Ligustrum sinense	Chinese privet	*Agarista populifolia*, Florida leucothoe *Citharexylum spinosum*, Fiddlewood, Florida fiddlewood *Hamelia patens,* Firebush *Ilex glabra*, Gallberry, inkberry *Illicium floridanum*, Florida anise *Illicium parviflorum*, Star anise *Itea virginica*, Virginia sweetspire *Viburnum obovatum*, Walter's viburnum	*Aloysia virgata*, Sweet almondshrub *Camellia japonica*, Japanese camellia *Camellia sasanqua*, Sasanqua camellia *Feijoa sellowiana*, Feijoa, pineapple guava *Gardenia jasminoides*, Gardenia *Ilex ×* 'Nellie R. Stevens', Nellie R. Stevens holly *Ilex cornuta*, Chinese holly *Leucophyllum frutescens*, Texas sage *Viburnum odoratissimum*, Sweet viburnum *Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki*, Awabuki viburnum *Viburnum suspensum*, Sandankwa viburnum
Lonicera japonica	Japanese honeysuckle	*Gelsemium sempervirens*, Carolina jessamine *Lonicera sempervirens*, Coral honeysuckle, trumpet honeysuckle *Passiflora incarnata,* Passion vine *Bignonia capreopata*, Cross vine	*Callerya reticulata,* Evergreen wisteria *Jasminum polyanthum*, Pink jasmine *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, Confederate jasmine (See *Gardening Solutions for Florida*) for additional vines
Melaleuca viminalis	Weeping bottlebrush	*Vachellia farnesiana,* Sweet acacia *Prunus umbellata,* Chickasaw plum *Hamelia patens,* Firebush *Chionanthus virginicus,* Fringe tree *Ilex vomitoria* 'Pendula', Weeping yaupon holly	*Lagerstroemia indica,* Crapemyrtle *Vitex agnus-castus,* Chastetree

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[y]
Scientific name	**Common name**		
Nandina domestica (species type or wild type)	Nandina, Heavenly bamboo	*Agarista populifolia*, Florida leucothoe *Itea virginica*, Virginia sweetspire *Psychotria nervosa*, Wild coffee *Ilex glabra,* Gall berry *Hamelia patens,* Firebush	*Nandina domestica* 'Firepower'[y], 'Firepower' nandina (sterile) *Nandina domestica* 'Firestorm', Firestorm nandina (sterile) *Nandina domestica* 'Monfar', Sienna Sunrise nandina (sterile) *Nandina domestica* 'Harbour Dwarf', Harbour Dwarf nandina (sterile) *Nandina domestica* 'Blush Pink', Blush Pink nandina (sterile)
Ruellia simplex	Mexican petunia	*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*, Blue-eyed grass *Stokesia laevis*, Stokes' aster, stokesia *Vernonia gigantea*, Giant ironweed *Helianthus angustifolius*, Narrowleaf sunflower	*Eranthemum pulchellum*, Blue sage *Iris* ser. *Hexagonae*, Louisiana iris (especially those with purple flowers) *Plectranthus x* 'Mona Lavender', Mona Lavender plectranthus *Ruellia simplex* 'Purple Showers'[y], Purple Showers Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Ruellia simplex* 'R10-102'[y], Mayan Purple Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Ruellia simplex* 'R10-108'[y], Mayan White Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Ruellia simplex* 'R12-2-1'[y], Mayan Compact Purple Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Ruellia simplex* R10-105-Q54[y], Mayan Pink Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Salvia ×* 'Indigo Spires', Indigo spires salvia *Salvia leucantha*, Mexican sage
Schinus terebinthifolius	Brazilian pepper	*Citharexylum spinosum*, Fiddlewood *Hamelia patens,* Firebush *Hydrangea quercifolia,* Oakleaf hydrangea *Ilex cassine,* Dahoon holly, dahoon *Ilex vomitoria*, Yaupon holly *Viburnum obovatum*, Walter's viburnum *Zanthoxyllum fagara*, Wild lime	*Cocculus laurifolius*, Laurel-leaf snailseed, cocculus *Ilex cornuta*, Chinese holly *Viburnum odoratissimum*, Sweet viburnum *Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki*, Awabuki viburnum *Viburnum suspensum*, Sandankwa viburnum

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[y]
Scientific name	**Common name**		
Sphagneticola trilobata	Wedelia	*Gaillardia pulchella*, Firewheel, Indian blanket-flower *Helianthus debilis*, Dune sunflower, beach sunflower *Mimosa strigillosa*, Powderpuff *Phyla nodiflora*, Turkey tangle, Fogfruit	*Arachis glabrata*, Rhizoma perennial peanut *Ipomoea batatas,* Ornamental sweetpotato
Stachytarpheta cayennensis	Nettle-leaf porterweed	*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*, Porterweed *Salvia misella*, Creeping sage *Dyschoris oblongifolia*, Twinflower	*Stachytarpheta mutabilis*, Purple porterweed, snakeweed *Stachytarpheta x* 'UF-NRC-2', Porterweed hybrid *Glandularia canadensis,* Rose verbena
Triadica sebifera	Chinese tallow tree, Popcorn tree	*Acer rubrum*, Red maple *Betula nigra,* River birch	*Lagerstroemia indica*, Crapemyrtle *Vitex agnus-castus*, Chastetree

[z] As listed by the UF/IFAS Status Assessment.

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

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