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Alternatives to Invasive Plants Commonly Found in South 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 UF/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 South 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 UF/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 south 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 (https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/), the U.S. National Plant Germplasm System (https://npgsweb.ars-grin.gov/gringlobal/taxon/taxonomysimple.aspx), and the Atlas of Florida Plants by the Institute for Systematic Biology (https://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/Default.aspx).

Invasive ornamental[z]		**Native substitute**	**Non-native, non-invasive substitute[z]**
Scientific Name	**Common Name**		
Ardisia crenata	Coral ardisia	*Ardisia escallonioides*, Marlberry *Callicarpa americana,* American beautyberry *Chrysobalanus icaco*, Cocoplum *Citharexylum spinosum*, Fiddlewood *Hamelia patens*, Firebush *Ilex vomitoria*, Yaupon holly *Myrsine cubana*, Myrsine *Psychotria ligustrifolia*, Bahama wild coffee *Psychotria nervosa*, Wild coffee *Viburnum obovatum*, Walter's viburnum, small-leaf viburnum	*Acalypha wilkesiana*, Wilke's copperleaf, Jacob's coat
Bauhinia variegata	Mountain ebony, orchid tree	*Bourreria succulenta,* Bahama strongbark *Canella winterana,* Pepper cinnamon, cinnamon bark, wild cinnimon *Cynophalla flexuosa*, Bayleaf capertree *Erythrina herbacea*, Coralbean, Cherokee-bean *Guaiacum sanctum*, Holywood ignum-vitae *Myrcianthes fragrans,* Simpson's stopper, twinberry *Piscidia piscipula*, Jamaican dogwood, Fish-poison tree *Vachellia choriophylla,* Cinnecord *Vachellia farnesiana* var. *farnesiana,* Sweet acacia	*Bauhinia × blakeana*, Hong Kong orchid tree, Blake's bauhinia *Cassia afrofistula,* Dwarf golden shower *Cassia fistula,* Golden shower *Clerodendrum quadriloculare,* Starburst clerodendrum *Cordia boissieri,* White cordia, Mexican olive *Dombeya burgessiae,* Seminole dombeya, Tropical rose hydrangea *Gardenia thunbergia,* White gardenia *Tabernaemontana divaricata,* Cape jasmine *Tibouchina granulosa,* Glory bush, princessflower
Bischofia javanica	Japanese bishopwood	*Juniperus virginiana*, Red cedar *Magnolia virginiana,* Sweetbay magnolia	*Platycladus orientalis,* Arborvitae, Oriental arborvitae *Podocarpus macrophyllus*, Podocarpus, Japanese yew *Ficus lyrata*, Fiddle-leaf fig
Casuarina equisetifolia	Australian pine, horsetail casuarina	*Juniperus virginiana*, Red cedar *Pinus elliottii*, Slash pine *Pinus palustris*, Longleaf pine *Taxodium distichum*, Bald cypress	*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[z]
Scientific Name	**Common Name**		
Colocasia esculenta	Elephant ear, wild taro	*Crinum americanum,* String-lily, Florida swamp-lily *Hymenocallis latifolia,* Mangrove spider-lily	*Cordyline fruticosa,* Ti plant, broadleaf palm-lily *Crinum asiaticum,* Grand crinum lily, Asiatic poisonbulb *Philodendron bipinnatifidum*, Selloum philodendron
Cupaniopsis anacardioides	Carrotwood	*Conocarpus erectus,* Buttonwood, button mangrove *Piscidia piscipula*, Jamaican dogwood, fish-poison tree *Sapindus saponaria,* Soapberry, soaptree *Simarouba glauca,* Paradise tree	*Ficus rubiginosa*, Rusty fig, littleleaf fig *Peltophorum dubium*, Horsebush, yellow poinciana *Terminalia buceras* (syn. *Bucida buceras*), Black olive
Dioscorea bulbifera	Air-potato	*Jacquemontia pentanthos,* Key West morning glory, Skyblue clustervine *Lonicera sempervirens,* Coral honeysuckle, trumpet honeysuckle	(See *Gardening Solutions for Florida* for additional vines.)
Eugenia uniflora	Surinam cherry	*Ardisia escallonioides*, Marlberry *Bourreria succulenta,* Bodywood, Bahama strongbark *Calyptranthes pallens,* Spicewood *Citharexylum spinosum*, Fiddlewood *Forestiera segregata*, Florida swampprivet *Guaiacum sanctum,* Holywood lignum-vitae *Morus rubra*, Red mulberry *Myrcianthes fragrans,* Simpson's stopper, twinberry *Myrsine cubana*, Myrsine *Psychotria nervosa*, Wild coffee	*Myrciaria cauliflora,* Jaboticaba *Pittosporum tobira,* Japanese cheesewood, Japanese pittosporum
Jasminum dichotomum	Gold coast jasmine	*Ernodea littoralis*, Beach creeper *Hymenocallis latifolia,* Mangrove spider-lily *Mimosa strigillosa*, Powderpuff *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*, Blue porterweed, Joee	*Jasminum multiflorum,* Star jasmine *Solandra grandiflora*, Chalicevine, solandra

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[z]
Scientific Name	**Common Name**		
Lantana strigocamara	Lantana, shrub verbena	*Byrsonima lucida,* Long Key locustberry *Hamelia patens,* Firebush *Lantana involucrata,* Buttonsage *Lycium carolinianum,* Christmasberry *Salvia coccinea*, Tropical sage, red salvia *Sophora tomentosa* var. *truncata,* Yellow necklacepod *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis,* Blue porterweed, Joee *Varronia globosa*, Curacao bush	*Lantana strigocamara* 'UF-1011-2'[y], Bloomify™ Rose lantana (sterile) *Lantana strigocamara* 'UF-1013A-2A'[y], Bloomify™ Red lantana (sterile) *Lantana strigocamara* 'UF-1013-1'[y]), Luscious® royale red zone lantana (sterile) *Rosa multiflora*, Wild rose
Lonicera japonica	Japanese honeysuckle	*Bignonia capreopata*, Cross vine *Lonicera sempervirens,* Coral honeysuckle *Symphyotrichum carolinianum*, Climbing aster	*Trachelospermum jasminoides*, Confederate jasmine (See *Gardening Solutions for Florida* for additional vines.)
Melaleuca quinquenervia	Melaleuca, paper bark, punk tree	*Annona glabra,* Pond apple *Conocarpus erectus* var. *sericeus,* Silver buttonwood *Conocarpus erectus*, Buttonwood, button mangrove *Magnolia virginiana,* Sweetbay *Simarouba glauca,* Paradise-tree	*Callistemon rigidus*, Bottlebrush, erect bottlebrush, stiff bottlebrush *Podocarpus macrophyllus*, Podocarpus, Japanese yew
Psidium cattleianum	Strawberry guava	*Annona glabra,* Pond apple *Bourreria succulenta,* Bahama strongbark *Calyptranthes pallens,* Spicewood *Canella winterana,* Pepper cinnamon, cinnamon bark, wild cinnimon *Citharexylum spinosum*, Fiddlewood *Coccoloba diversifolia,* Pigeon plum, tie-tongue *Cynophalla flexuosa*, Bayleaf capertree *Erythrina herbacea,* Coralbean, Cherokee-bean *Guapira discolor,* Blolly, beeftree *Ilex cassine,* Dahoon holly, dahoon *Myrcianthes fragrans,* Simpson's stopper, twinberry *Simarouba glauca,* Paradise-tree	*Lagerstroemia speciosa*, Queen's crapemyrtle *Macadamia integrifolia,* Macadamia nut *Noronhia emarginata,* Madagascar olive *Pimenta dioica,* Allspice tree *Pimenta racemosa,* Bay rum tree, West Indian bay

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[z]
Scientific Name	**Common Name**		
Ruellia simplex	Mexican petunia	*Crinum americanum,* String-lily, Florida swamp-lily *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis,* Blue porterweed *Vernonia gigantea*, Giant ironweed *Ruellia caroliniensis*, Carolina wild petunia *Trichostema dichotomum*, Blue curls	*Bougainvillea spectabilis,* Great bougainvillea, purple bougainvillea *Ruellia simplex,* 'Purple Showers'[y], Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Ruellia simplex* R-15-5-3[y], Aztec Purple 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* 'R12-2-1'[y], Mayan Compact Purple Mexican petunia (sterile, non-invasive by seed dispersal) *Russelia equisetiformis*, Coral plant, firecracker plant
Scaevola taccada var. *sericea*	Beach naupaka, half-flower, scaevola	*Chrysobalanus icaco* 'Horizontal', 'Horizontal' cocoplum *Genipa clusiifolia,* Seven-year apple *Heliotropium gnaphalodes*, Sea lavender, sea rosemary *Scaevola plumieri,* Beachberry, inkberry *Sophora tomentosa* var. *truncata,* Yellow necklacepod *Suriana maritima,* Bay cedar *Yucca aloifolia*, Spanish bayonet, aloe yucca	*Carissa macrocarpa,* Amatungulu, natal plum *Pittosporum tobira,* Japanese pittosporum, Japanese cheesewood
Schefflera actinophylla	Australian umbrella tree, Queensland umbrella tree	*Canella winterana,* Cinnamon bark, wild cinnamon *Guapira discolor,* Blolly, beeftree *Sabal palmetto*, Cabbage Palm *Simarouba glauca,* Paradise-tree	*Beaucarnea recurvata,* Ponytail palm *Pandanus utilis,* Screwpine Phoenix sylvestris, Wild date palm *Ravenala madagascariensis,* Traveler's palm, traveler's tree *Strelitzia nicolai,* White bird of paradise

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[z]
Scientific Name	**Common Name**		
Schinus terebinthifolius	Brazilian pepper	*Ardisia escallonioides*, Marlberry *Calyptranthes pallens,* Spicewood *Citharexylum spinosum*, Fiddlewood *Erythrina herbacea*, Coralbean, Cherokee-bean *Forestiera segregata,* Florida swampprivet *Hamelia patens,* Firebush *Ilex cassine,* Dahoon holly, dahoon *Ilex vomitoria*, Yaupon holly *Miconia bicolor*, Tetrazygia, Florida clover ash *Myrcianthes fragrans,* Simpson's stopper, twinberry *Morella cerifera,* Wax myrtle, southern bayberry *Myrsine cubana*, Myrsine *Psychotria nervosa*, Wild coffee *Sambucus nigra* subsp. *canadensis*, Elderberry, American elder *Viburnum obovatum*, Walter's viburnum, small-leaf viburnum	*Viburnum odoratissimum*, Sweet viburnum *Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki*, Awabuki sweet viburnum *Viburnum suspensum*, Sandankwa viburnum
Senna pendula var. *glabrata*	Christmas senna, Christmas cassia, climbing cassia	*Guaiacum sanctum,* Holywood lignum-vitae *Sambucus nigra* subsp. *canadensis,* Elderberry, American elder *Senna ligustrina,* Privet wild sensitive plant *Senna mexicana* var. *chapmanii,* Chapman's senna *Sophora tomentosa* var. *truncata,* Yellow necklacepod	*Senna polyphylla,* Desert cassia *Senna surattensis,* Glossy shower *Tabernaemontana divaricata*, Crape jasmine
Sphagneticola trilobata	Wedelia	*Ernodea littoralis*, Beach creeper *Helianthus debilis*, Dune sunflower, beach sunflower *Hymenocallis latifolia,* Mangrove spider-lily *Mimosa strigillosa*, Powderpuff *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*, Blue porterweed, Joee *Zamia integrifolia*, Coontie, Florida arrowroot	*Arachis glabrata*, Rhizoma perennial peanut *Juniperus chinensis* 'Parsonii', Parson's Chinese juniper *Trachelospermum asiaticum*, Asiatic jasmine, dwarf jasmine *Zamia furfuracea*[z], Cardboard cycad, Cardboard palm

Invasive ornamental[z]		Native substitute	Non-native, non-invasive substitute[z]
Scientific Name	**Common Name**		
Syzygium cumini	Jambolan, Java plum	*Bursera simaruba,* Gumbo limbo *Ficus aurea*, Strangler fig *Morus rubra*, Red mulberry *Quercus laurifolia*, Laurel oak *Quercus virginiana*, Live oak, southern live oak *Sideroxylon foetidissimum*, False mastic *Swietenia mahagoni*, West Indian mahogany	*Azadirachta indica*, Neem, Indian-lilac, nimtree *Ficus elastica*, Indian rubber tree, Indian rubber plant, *Ficus lyrata*, Fiddleleaf fig *Ficus rubiginosa*, Rusty fig, littleleaf fig *Peltophorum dubium*, Horsebush, yellow poinciana
Taliparitiliaceum	Sea hibiscus, mahoe	*Bursera simaruba,* Gumbo limbo *Clusia rosea,* Pitchapple, Scotch-attorney *Piscidia piscipula,* Jamaican dogwood, fish-poison tree	*Cassia fistula,* Golden shower *Cassia javanica,* Apple blossom cassia, Pink shower *Ficus elastica,* Rubber tree, India rubber fig, India rubber tree *Ficus lyrata,* Fiddleleaf fig
Triadica sebifera	Chinese tallow tree, popcorn tree	*Acer rubrum*, Red maple *Bourreria succulenta,* Bahama strongbark *Conocarpus erectus* var. *sericeus,* Silver buttonwood *Conocarpus erectus*, Buttonwood, button mangrove *Guapira discolor,* Blolly, beeftree *Liquidambar styraciflua*, Sweetgum *Platanus occidentalis*, American sycamore, American planetree *Sapindus saponaria,* Soapberry, soaptree *Simarouba glauca,* Paradise-tree	*Jacaranda mimosifolia,* Jacaranda, green-ebony, black poui *Lagerstroemia* spp., crapemyrtle *Peltophorum dubium*, Horsebush, yellow poinciana

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

[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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