

Sanibel Island Schinus: terribleitsbeenforus

Over the past year, I've gazed into the loaded beds of the many tree service and landscape trailers leaving Sanibel Island each evening. No, I don't have a deep-seeded affection for yard tools. I do have a subconscious desire to know what kind of vegetation is involuntarily leaving the fair island. I've decided that "science and compliance" are the culprits driving this desire.

Sanibel has some of the state's strictest vegetation standards and native plant-protecting ordinances. As the city's "Conservation Officer," I should try to keep tabs on what plants are leaving Sanibel, and what parts of the island they're being taken from. The island seems to be a "bottomless pit" of vegetation. Sometimes I think there's a secret place on the island where trucks are issued loads of horticultural waste. The number of vegetation-laden trucks moving around Sanibel seems to have increased over the past year, and my interest in this phenomenon has peaked. My only consolation is that many of the trucks scurrying around Sanibel are loaded with the exotic pest plant Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*).

Of all of the invasive exotic plants in Florida, I believe none are as recognizable and ubiquitous as Brazilian pepper. And the area occupied by this plant increases yearly. The South Florida Water Management District's 1997 survey estimated that pepper has invaded more than 660,000 acres in South Florida. That's a whole bunch of truckloads!

Why is this plant continuing to spread across Florida? Most places where pepper is already established are not being controlled, and this plant seems to be invading new areas before our eyes. I would compare it to time-lapse photography in "real-time." Is it a lost cause? I think not. Sanibel Island has recently adopted a Brazilian pepper removal program (Sanibel: Pepper Free!). It hopes to rid the city of Brazilian pepper by 2010. Public awareness and support, an enthusiastic city council and governmental incentives to private property owners have helped launch this program. The rest of the Florida should follow

suit. It may take longer (and cost more money), but don't we have the responsibility to take hold of the beast that's eating our state!?! -Dan Clark, City of Sanibel Conservation Officer.

I'm a pepper
You're a pepper
He's a pepper
She's a pepper
Wouldn't you like
To kill of a pepper or two?
-Dan Clark



Barbara Waddell (left, Pepper Patrol of Ruskin) and Ken Langeland (skinny guy with the big beard, University of Florida, IFAS) take a well-deserved break.



The Pepper Patrol of Ruskin gives 'em hell. Photo by Ken Langeland.

Did you know?

Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*) is thought to have been introduced into Florida in the 1840s as a cultivated ornamental plant.

Schinus is the Greek word for mastic-tree, a plant with resinous sap, which this genus resembles. The species name, *terebinthifolius* is a combination of the genus name *Terebinthus* and the Latin word *folia*, leaf. It refers to the leaves of Brazilian pepper that resemble the leaves of species in the genus *Terebinthus*.

