

When is a weed a *weed*? Some critics of the Exotic Pest Plant Councils allege that the term "invasive" is a subjective, baseless term used to bolster weed management programs. Anyone who's ever walked through a melaleuca forest knows better. As the issue of invasive exotic plants gains more support and attention, we are bound to be met with naysayers who deem the cause unworthy and unnecessary.

Granted, the scientific literature devoted to ecological impacts of environmental weeds is not overwhelming. It pales in comparison to the amount of work that has been done for agricultural weeds, for example. But the nature of

the problem of invasive plants in natural areas often forces weed scientists into "triage research." Once a plant is detected and observed spreading in a natural area, it is often not possible or practical to conduct long-term research into the ecological effects of the species. There are exceptions, of course and we should encourage as many ecological studies as possible.

Dan Austin's article, "Caesar's Weed – An invasive exotic, or a Florida native?" (p. 13) walks us through the process by which a botanist deems a plant "invasive." It's based on professional judgement and the best available information. As Dan Ward (esteemed retired botanist, University of Florida) once said, "Invasiveness is like pornography, I know it when I see it!" Good enough for me. –Amy Ferriter

Botanical Gardens, Arboreta, and Invasive Exotic Plants

By: Johnny Randall

Humans have a propensity for altering their environment in order to have easy access to various natural resources. The desire for ready access to food and medicinal plants ushered in agricultural and horticultural practices over 10,000 years ago. (Were not community gardens the first convenience and drug stores?) It is also reasonable to believe that positioning shade trees around a dwelling was practiced by early pre-air-conditioned humans. Evidence that early humans also appreciated the beauty of flowering plants exists by discovering wildflower remains in Cro Magnon cave burial sites. It is also generally known that early humans traded plants along with other commodities via long distance trade routes. Cultivating plants for beauty and pleasure, therefore, occurred at the cradle of humanity. The epitome of this affinity for growing plants solely for pleasure is surely the creation of botanical gardens and arboreta.

This article presents a brief history of botanical gardens and arboreta¹ (BG&A), how they have contributed

¹For a more detailed account of the historical development of botanical gardens and arboreata, please refer to Moore, J.D., in Radford, A.E. et al., 1974, *Vascular Plant Systematics*, Harper & Row, New York, Chapter 32, pp. 775-790



Garden of Flowering Plant Families – This site in the North Carolina Botanical Garden shows flowering plant diversity and the evolutionary relationship among plant families. Numerous exotic plants are featured here, but only if they have not been identified as "invasive" within the southeastern United States.