

Explore your AlterNatives

A PLANT SUBSTITUTION GUIDE FOR SOUTH FLORIDA

by Amy Ferriter

Peruse a Florida gardening book published before 1980, and you will find plenty of familiar plant species. Unfortunately, many of them are exotic species that now are widespread in Florida's roadsides and natural areas. Some plant recommendations from the past – melaleuca, schefflera and Australian pine, for example - are no longer considered environmentally sound. Removing these plants from your private property can eliminate a major source of invasion, either by seeds or vegetative spread, into natural areas.

There are invasive plants that serve a function in the landscape – who can deny the shade provided by carrotwood or the fall color display of Chinese tallow? Removal of these plants may seem like a sacrifice for the homeowner, but it can be a short-term problem with long-term benefits to Florida's natural areas.

So how do you remove the showy Brazilian pepper that shades the popular neighborhood tree fort? The first step is to consider the value of the tree in your landscape. What does it do in the landscape - does it provide shade or privacy? Has it been some time since you really looked at that old tree? Is it scraping the roof of the house? Does the fruit stain the driveway? Is it really that valuable?

The following guidelines explain how to control invasive species on your property and offers suitable substitutes that closely resemble some invasive plants commonly used in landscapes. In choosing plant substitutes, consider height, growth rate, hardiness, salt tolerance, foliage texture, flowering characteristics, light and nutritional requirements.

Please check with your local government and/or homeowner association for specific tree removal regulations. Many require permits or permission to remove and/or alter vegetation in your landscape. On the other hand, some local governments now require the removal of certain invasive exotic plants.

Exotic Plant Replacement Techniques

The following recommendations are not absolute and may vary due to your particular situation. If you have specific questions, contact a local certified arborist to do an onsite consultation.

Alternative 1: Remove it. Call a certified arborist to cut down the tree and have the stump ground. This procedure is recommended for trees that present immediate hazards to safety or structures.

Alternative 2: Treat the plant with a herbicide. Trees can be controlled by applying herbicides in many different ways. Techniques include: girdling, cut stump, foliar and basal bark treatments. For detailed descriptions of herbicides and application techniques, see Herbicide Advice for Homeowners on the reverse side.

Alternative 3: Phase the plant out of your landscape. When dealing with trees, this procedure could require a minimum of 5 years to complete. First, judge the landscape effect and value of the plant. If it is a tree, what is it providing - shade, privacy, specimen? Then choose an appropriate replacement. A variety of native replacement options has been provided for you here.

To phase a pest tree out of your landscape, place the new tree 10-15 ft away from the existing tree. Remember that it will take 6-12 months for most trees to become fully established. Thin the existing pest plant by 25% within the next 30 days. Repeat this procedure annually for the next 4 years. Remove remaining pest tree and grind stump in year 5. You should now have an established AlterNative tree that will gradually fulfill similar requirements as the tree that was removed.

Alternative 4: Remove existing tree and replace with containerized or balled & burlapped tree of similar size. In most cases professional assistance will be required to install large replacement trees. Beware of sunburn. When removing or thinning a large tree, the understory is acclimated to shaded conditions. With the removal of an entire or even partial canopy, increased light can sunburn desirable species – such as grasses and shrubs - below. This can include temporary leaf/stem burn, defoliation or even death of the plants. The safest technique is gradual removal.

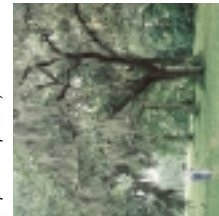
Note: when replacing trees, watch for underground and overhead utilities. In all circumstances, trees with mature height in excess of 15 ft should not be planted within 15 ft of overhead power lines.

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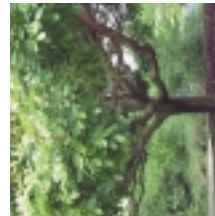
Plant	Height	Form	Texture	Flower	Fruit	Comments
Java plum (<i>Syzigium cumini</i>)	80'	Large, rounded canopy	Coarse	Insignificant	Purplish, red shiny berries	EXOTIC This native ficus is a good replacement for Java plum, but it must be given lots of room!
Strangler fig (<i>Ficus aurea</i>)	50'	Large, rounded canopy	Coarse	Insignificant	Black	
Florida Soapberry (<i>Sapindus saponaria</i>)	40'	Round, densely branched canopy	Medium to Coarse	Insignificant	Capsules	Soapberry is a great, fast growing shade tree that will not get quite as tall as a Java plum.
Mastic (<i>Sideroxylon foetidissimum</i>)	45'	Large, round canopy	Medium to Coarse	Yellow, fragrant	Yellow, gummy fruit	Mastic is a suitable replacement for Java plum if you need a large shade tree. Like Java plum, it drops a lot of messy fruit.
Laurel fig (<i>Ficus microcarpa</i>)	50'	Rounded, dense crown	Medium	Insignificant	Dark red berries	EXOTIC Replace an exotic ficus with a native ficus like strangler fig if you are looking for a large, spreading shade tree.
Strangler fig (<i>Ficus aurea</i>)	50'	Large rounded canopy	Coarse	Insignificant	Black	
Mastic (<i>Sideroxylon foetidissimum</i>)	45'	Large, round canopy	Medium to Coarse	Yellow, fragrant	Yellow, gummy fruit	Mastics are large, shady fast-growing trees.
Live oak (<i>Quercus virginiana</i>)	60'	Large, spreading canopy	Fine	Yellowish catkins	Acorns	Oaks are a classic shade tree. Use live oaks to replace a shady Laurel fig. Oaks are stable in strong winds and many animals, including deer, squirrels and blue jays, eat the acorns.
Australian pine (<i>Casuarina spp.</i>)	150'	Open, irregular canopy	Fine	Insignificant	In woody, cone-like clusters	EXOTIC This is a great choice especially when you are replacing an Australian pine hedge. The texture is almost identical and it responds well to shearing.
Red cedar	45'	Upright, compact	Fine	Small, cone-like	Round, powdery blue berries	
Slash pine (<i>Pinus elliotii</i>)	100'	Open, irregular canopy	Fine	Insignificant	Cones with spiny scales	Although they look like pines, Australian pines are not really pine trees. If you like the look of pine needles, try one of South Florida's native pines in a dry area of your yard.
Sand pine (<i>Pinus clausa</i>)	40'	Open, irregular canopy	Fine	Insignificant	Cones with spiny scales	Another native Florida pine. More compact than the slash pine, and may be more suited in scale for small, urban yards.
Carrotwood (<i>Cupaniopsis anacardioides</i>)	30'	Single trunk, compact	Medium	Small, greenish white	3-lobed orange capsules, 3 seeds	EXOTIC This is one of South Florida's most beautiful native trees. The growth of this large shade tree is a nice contrast in the landscape. Considerably larger than a carrotwood.
Paradise Tree (<i>Sinarouba glauca</i>)	50'	Single trunk, rounded crown	Medium	Small, cream to yellow peach-colored new	Clustered, red to purple to black drupe	
Pigeon Plum (<i>Coccoloba diversifolia</i>)	25'	Single trunk, compact	Medium to Coarse with dense foliage	Small, white	Blackberry-like	This Florida native resembles carrotwood, although it is slightly more narrow and compact. The medium sized tree can be used as an attractive accent, and the fruit attracts wildlife.
Florida Cupania (<i>Cupania glabra</i>)	30'	Single trunk, compact	Medium	Small, white	3-lobed capsules containing 3 round, black seeds	Almost identical to carrotwood, the biggest challenge for using this species is finding it in a nursery. Tolerates well-drained, poor soil conditions.
Paperbark tree (<i>Melaleuca quinquenervia</i>)	75'	Upright with slender crown	Fine	Creamy, white showy "bottle brush" spikes	In round woody capsules that are in clusters around stems	EXOTIC Good choice if you are looking for something fairly tall to replace melaleuca in wetter areas of your yard.
Southern Magnolia (<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>)	80'	Upright shade tree	Coarse	White, fragrant, very showy	Red cones	



Florida Soapberry - (*Sapindus saponaria*)

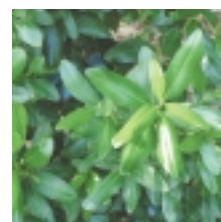


Live oak - (*Quercus virginiana*)



Paradise Tree - (*Sinarouba glauca*)

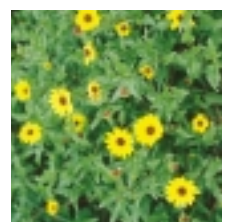
Lignum Vitae	15'	Small	Blue, star-shaped.	Yellowish fruits	This is a slow growing small tree that can be used to replace melaleuca if you like a tree with rough white bark.
Silver buttonwood (<i>Conocarpus erectus</i> var. <i>sericeus</i>)	25'	Spreading vase-shaped crown	Insignificant	Round, wood brown cones	This small to medium tree (it is often trimmed into a hedge) is upright and compact. Although melaleuca has white, peeling bark, silver buttonwoods have gnarled bark and fuzzy silvery-gray foliage that also will give you contrast in the landscape.
Ligustrum (<i>Ligustrum sinense</i>)	12'	Multi-stemmed spreading shrub	Fine	Dark blue to bluish black drupes	EXOTIC
Florida Privet (<i>Forsesteria segregata</i>)	to 10' 4-6' hedge	Multi-stem, spreading shrub	Fine	Small, purple	Almost identical in texture, can easily be sheared into a formal hedge. Full sun to partial shade. Well-drained to moist soils.
Wax Myrtle (<i>Myrica cerifera</i>)	to 15' 4-6' hedge	Multi-stem, spreading shrub	Fine	1/8" waxy, bluish clusters	Fine-textured. Can be used as a specimen shrub or a formal hedge. Full sun. Well-drained to moist soils.
Rusty lyonia (<i>Lyonia ferruginea</i>)	10'-15'	Multi-stem upright shrub	Fine	Round brown capsule	Great low maintenance native for full to partial sun. Prefers acidic soil, but will tolerate both damp and well-drained conditions.
Strawberry guava (<i>Psidium littorale</i>)	to 25'	Semi-upright shrub to small tree	Medium	1.5" red fruit	EXOTIC
Simpson stopper (<i>Myrcianthes fragrans</i>)	to 25'	Upright shrub to small tree	Fine	1/2" red berry	When limbed up, this small tree is almost identical to Strawberry guava with attractive red, peeling bark. Full sun to partial shade.
Myrsine (<i>Rapanea punctata</i>)	to 25'	Dense, vertical-growing shrub to small tree	Medium	1/2" black berry	Attractive mottled bark that can be highlighted with careful pruning. Full sun to deep shade. Dry to moist soils. Can be used as an accent tree when strong vertical growth is pruned. Attractive small tree; a great replacement for specimen Strawberry guava. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained soils. Pruning encourages vertical growth.
Jamaican caper (<i>Capparis cynophallophora</i>)	to 20'	Upright shrub to small tree	Medium	Cylindrical pods 3-8" long	EXOTIC
Asparagus fern (<i>Asparagus densiflorus</i>)	2'	Spreading	Fine	1/4" red berry	Full sun. Well-drained soil. Glossy, fleshy leaves form mounds that look similar to the growth form of Asparagus fern.
Beach creeper (<i>Ernodea littoralis</i>)	2'	Spreading	Fine	1/4" yellow	Full sun. Well-drained to moist soils. Lush, blue-green foliage offers contrast in the landscape.
Seaside Heliotrope (<i>Heliotropium curassavicum</i>)	1'	Spreading	Fine	Small, white	A good choice for replacing mass-plantings of Asparagus fern. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained to moist soils
Sword fern (<i>Nephrolepis exaltata</i>)	2'	Upright, spreading	Fine	Spores	EXOTIC
Oyster plant (<i>Rheo spathacea</i>)	1'	Clump	Medium	Insignificant	EXOTIC
Spider lily (<i>Rhynchospora latifolia</i>)	2'	Clump	Coarse	White cluster	Similar form; can be used as a mass planting in full sun. Tolerates poor, well-drained soil.
Peperomia (<i>Peperomia obtusifolia</i>)	8"	Spreading	Coarse	Insignificant	Great replacement as a ground-cover in partial to full shade.
Dwarf Fakahatchee (<i>Tripsicum dactyloides</i>)	2'	Clump	Fine	Linear rust-colored spike	Versatile groundcover for full sun, this plant can be used to cover large areas attractively.
Wedelia (<i>Wedelia trilobata</i>)	6"-10"	Spreading	Medium, yellow	Insignificant	EXOTIC
Lantana (<i>Lantana camara</i>)	8"-10"	Spreading	Medium, yellow	Purple drupes	EXOTIC
Dune sunflower (<i>Helianthus debilis</i>)	1'-2'	Spreading	Medium	Medium, yellow	This species is virtually indestructible in dry, harsh conditions. The cheerful yellow flowers are a good replacement for both <i>Wedelia</i> and <i>Lantana camara</i> .
Blanket flower (<i>Gallardia pulchella</i>)	1'-2'	Spreading, clump	Medium	Medium, Red and Yellow	This colorful, clumping native wildflower likes full sun and well-drained soils.
Beach verbena (<i>Glandularia maritima</i>)	1'	Spreading, clump	Medium	Medium, purple	Beach verbena does best in full sun. It will form a spreading, colorful clump.
Scaevola (<i>Scaevola sericea</i>)	15'	Sprawling, bushy shrub	Coarse	Fleshy, white	EXOTIC
Inkberry (<i>Scaevola plumieri</i>)	3'-5'	Sprawling, bushy shrub	Medium to Coarse	Small, white, fanlike	This native <i>Scaevola</i> performs well in full sun and well-drained soils. Excellent salt tolerance for coastal situations.
Seven-year apple (<i>Genipa clusifolia</i>)	8'	Single or multi-stem compact shrub	Medium to Coarse	Showy, fragrant white	Similar to <i>Scaevola</i> in texture, this species also thrives in full sun and well-drained, poor soils. Salt tolerant.
Necklace pod (<i>Sophora tomentosa</i>)	6'-8'	Multi-stem sprawling shrub	Fine to Medium	Bean shaped seed pods	This silvery-leaved species requires full sun but tolerates poor soils. It can be used in coastal situations.
Shoebuttan ardisia (<i>Ardisia elliptica</i>)	15'	Multi-stemmed upright shrub	Medium	Light purple, clusters	EXOTIC
Coral ardisia (<i>Ardisia crenata</i>)	6'	Multi-stemmed upright shrub	Medium	White to pink clusters	EXOTIC
Marberry (<i>Ardisia eschallonoides</i>)	10'-20'	Single to multi-stemmed compact shrub	Coarse	Showy, whites	This native <i>Ardisia</i> is a perfect replacement for the exotic species. It is very similar in form and texture in the landscape.
Wild coffee (<i>Psychotria nervosa</i>)	5'	Multi-stemmed upright shrub	Medium	fragrant cluster	Great choice for replacing exotic <i>Ardisia</i> in shady areas.
Myrsine (<i>Rapanea punctata</i>)	10-20'	Multi-stemmed upright shrub	Medium	Small, white	A versatile shrub that can replace exotic <i>Ardisia</i> in almost any landscape situation.
Brazilian pepper (<i>Schinus terebinthifolius</i>)	30'	Multi-stemmed spreading shrub	Medium	Small, bright red drupe	EXOTIC
Varnish leaf (<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i>)	6'	Single or multi-stemmed upright shrub	Fine	Showy, winged fruit	A shiny-leaved shrub; good substitute for a Brazilian pepper hedge.
Elderberry (<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>)	10'-15'	Multi-stemmed, spreading	Fine	Showy, white clusters	Like Brazilian pepper, this species can be used as a shrub or a small tree. Its texture and form offer a great alternative for screening large areas.
Seagrape (<i>Coccoloba uvifera</i>)	30'	Multi-trunked, rounded canopy	Coarse	Insignificant	This broad, spreading multi-stemmed tree is a great replacement for Brazilian pepper when trying to screen views from your house or yard. It also can be used as a hedge.
Earleaf acacia (<i>Acacia auriculiformis</i>)	50'	Open, spreading canopy	Medium	Loose, yellow orange spikes	EXOTIC
Mastic (<i>Masticodendron toetidissimum</i>)	45'	Single trunk, rounded crown	Medium to coarse	Fragrant, yellow	Very large, shady tree that is a good choice for quick shade.
Mahogany (<i>Swietenia mahagoni</i>)	50'	Single trunk, spreading canopy	Fine	Insignificant	Great choice for a spreading shade tree in South Florida.
Florida Scaeberry (<i>Sapindus saponaria</i>)	40'	Round, densely branched canopy	Medium to Coarse	Insignificant	An excellent replacement for Earleaf acacia. Fast growing, very drought tolerant, with attractive foliage.



Myrsine - (*Rapanea punctata*)



Jamaican caper - (*Capparis cynophallophora*)



Dune sunflower - (*Helianthus debilis*)



Blanket flower - (*Gallardia pulchella*)



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