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 roadways 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 for 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 substitutions, 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, 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 the same functions 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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Wild Weeds – Fall 2003
in garden shrubbery or as ground cover in full sun. Full sun to partial shade. Well-drained to moist soils. 

**Ligustrum** (Ligustrum sinense) - Unpleasantly fragrant Florida Privet to 10' Multi-stem, spreading shrub Fine Small, white, clusters 1/8" waxy, bluish clusters Fine-textured. Can be used as a specimen shrub or a formal hedge. Full sun to partial shade. Well-drained to moist soils.

**Lyonia** (Lyonia ferruginea) - Great low maintenance native for full to partial sun. Prefers pinkish white, fragrant acidic soil, but will tolerate both damp and well-drained conditions. Medium Light purple, clusters Round, brown capsule Great low maintenance native with red spring flowers. Full sun to partial shade. Well-drained to moist soils.

**Psidium** (Psidium littorale) - Strawberry guava with attractive red, peeling bark. Medium Size, yellow 1.5" red fruit EXOTIC Scaevola plumieri. Full sun to partial shade. Well-drained to moist soils. 

**Capparis** (Capparis cynophallophora) - Jamaican caper - to 20' Upright shrub to small tree Medium Medium, showy Cylindrical pods 3-8" long Attractive small tree; a great replacement for specimen or hedge. Full sun. Well-drained, poor soils. Salt tolerant.

**Asparagus** (Asparagus densiflorus) - Asparagus fern to 2' Spreading Fine Small, white 1/4" red berry EXOTIC (Ernodea littoralis) (Heliotropium curassavicum) - Sword fern - 2' Clump Coarse White cluster 2" oval Similar form; can be used as a mass planting in full sun. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained to moist soils.

**Hymenocallis** (Hymenocallis latifolia) - Dune sunflower - to 30' Multi-stemmed, spreading shrub Fine to Coarse Small, red, clusters 1" white, flat, fanlike Glossy, black This native shrub is a great alternative for a spreading shrub or hedge in the landscape. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained, poor soils. Salt tolerant.

**Scaevola** (Scaevola plumieri) - Blanket flower - 3'-5' Sprawling, bushy shrub Medium to Coarse Small, white, fanlike Glossy, black This native shrub is a great alternative for a spreading shrub or hedge in the landscape. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained, poor soils. Salt tolerant.

**Seven-year apple** (Genipa clusifolia) - 8' Single or multi-stem compact shrub Medium to Coarse Showy, fragrant white Similar to Scaevola in texture; can easily be sheared into a formal hedge. Full sun to partial shade. Well-drained to moist soils.

**Necklace pod** (Sophora tomentosa) - Shoebutton ardisia (Ardisia elliptica) - 15' Multi-stemmed upright shrub Medium Light purple, clusters Round, black fruit EXOTIC Coral ardisia (Psychotria nervosa) - Marlberry (Ardisia escallonioides) 10'-20' Single to multi-stemmed Coarse Showy, white Black clusters This native shrub is a great alternative for a spreading shrub or hedge in the landscape. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained, poor soils. Salt tolerant.

**Marlberry** (Ardisia escallonioides) - 10'-20' Single to multi-stemmed Coarse Showy, white Black clusters This native shrub is a great alternative for a spreading shrub or hedge in the landscape. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained, poor soils. Salt tolerant.

**Buddleja** (Buddleja davidii) - Yellow buttonwood (Zamia floridana) - 6' Single or multi-stemmed shrub Medium Size, yellow 1/2" waxy, blue-green clusters Fine-textured. Can be used as a specimen shrub or a formal hedge. Full sun. Well-drained to moist soils.

**Lucia** (Lucia anisophylla) - 6'-12' Multi-stemmed spreading shrub Fine to Coarse Small, white, clusters 3/8" white, fuzzy texture Similar form; can be used as a mass planting in full sun. Full sun to deep shade. Well-drained to moist soils.