

Pest Plant Packets for Lake People

by Fritzi S. Olson

The problem of invasive exotic plants is recognized worldwide, and Florida seems to be especially impacted by their introduction. The shorelines of Lake Santa Fe, other dark water lakes, and the region's sandhill lakes are no exception, especially with the ever-intensifying development taking place around these popular water bodies. Education about these harmful invasive pest plants and the assistance of homeowners in stemming the tide of their spread is imperative if our native ecosystems are to stand a chance. The "Pest Plant Packets for Lake People" project is one small effort to help.

As part of an invasive plant survey and homeowner education project on Lake Santa Fe in Alachua County, Current Problems, Inc., a non-profit corporation in Gainesville, Florida, compiled a packet of information about invasive plants and good waterfront landscaping habits. Homeowners seemed very pleased to receive these packets, as most that we talked with were quite interested in the problem of invasive exotic plants.

After completing the survey and discovering additional plants, Current Problems decided to expand the packets to include the Lake Region of North Florida in general. An Education and Outreach grant from the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council made this possible.

We targeted the "Four Corners" area of north-central Florida, which includes parts of Alachua, Bradford, Clay and Putnam counties. The region is full of both dark and clear water lakes. Some are surrounded by cypress swamp. Lake Santa Fe is a dark water lake bordered by swamps featuring dahoon holly, red maple, pond cypress and black gum, and mixed bays farther in, along with buttonbush and other shrubs in the understory. Dense maidencane with scattered clumps of rushes, lilies and other emergent species line the shore. Other lakes, such as Swan Lake, are the "sandhill" lakes, characterized by white sand bottoms, clear water, and much different vegetation close to the shorelines, such as turkey oaks, live oaks and pines. Sandhill lakes also tend to be more inhabited by humans, providing more disturbed sites than the swamp-bordered lakes in the area. Invasive

plants can establish themselves anywhere it seems, but disturbed lands provide especially good opportunities. In addition, any of the lakes can have nuisance aquatic plants, especially hydrilla and water hyacinth.

Because the spread of invasive exotic species and landscaping habits may often be related, and because landscaping habits contribute to the health of a lake, Current Problems wanted to include information on good waterfront landscaping practices in addition to information about invasive plant species.

We consulted with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection – Bureau of Invasive Plant Management, the UF/IFAS Alachua County Extension Office, and the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department (ACEPD) to determine which plants to describe in the Pest Plant Packet. Tim Harris of ACEPD was especially helpful, as he had previously worked for the Bureau of Invasive Plant Management and had visited many of the lakes in our target area.

The waterfront landscaping information included advice about what to plant in which zone along one's shoreline, good landscaping management practices, and the value of healthy shorelines.

To develop the packet, Current Problems gathered together an assortment of materials already available, rather than producing new ones. We found excellent materials to include

from the Florida DEP-Bureau of Invasive Plant Management, UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, Southwest Florida and St. Johns River Water Management Districts, and the Alachua County Extension Office Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program (FYN).

Wendy Wilber of the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program customized IFAS materials for our project and worked with us in adapting the IFAS Fact Sheet 44B, "Selected Invasive Exotic Plants in the North Central Florida Lake Region" to present the plants chosen for the packet. (Fact Sheet 44B can be requested from the Alachua County Extension Office, 352-955-2402.)

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Wedelia



Sesbania

Pest Plant Packets *continued*

Wendy also helped us bring two workshops to the community about invasive, exotic plants. Claudia Larson, president of the Gainesville Native Plant Society, and Dan Rountree, president, and Fritz Olson, executive director of Current Problems, assisted with presentations focusing on the issue of invasive plants, plants of concern in our area, methods of removal, alternative species, and good landscaping practices and principles. Plant specimens were on hand to facilitate identification among attendees. Many handouts, including the Pest Plant Packets, were available for participants to take home.

Pest Plant Packets also were distributed at the Bonnie Melrose Lakefest in March, the public libraries, the local post offices, and even a real estate office in Melrose to offer their customers. The Pest Plant Packets seemed to be well received by area residents.

Current Problems hopes to assemble a similar packet about urban creeks in the Greater Gainesville area. These creeks are quickly being over-run by invasive exotic plants. We hope to garner citizen help to rein in this spread and restore the habitat along the city's creek beds.

To help address the basic problem of shoreline management practices among residents, businesses, agriculture operations, forestry interests, and even government lands, Current Problems is launching Restore A Shore. This new program seeks to educate and increase awareness among North Florida's citizens about the importance of healthy shoreline ecosystems, whether they be lake or pond, river or creek, spring or sink, marsh or swamp, canal or drainage ditch. Invasive exotic plants, shoreline revegetation, native plants, good waterfront landscaping practices, wildlife needs, and thoughtful living habits will be emphasized. Healthy shoreline ecosystems contribute tremendously to both water quality and wildlife habitat, important to us all – whether we always realize it or not.

For more information, contact the author at 352-264-6827 or aar@currentproblems.org

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