



# Don't Plant a Problem

## *Invasive Garden Species*

Sometimes garden plants jump the fence and invade natural areas. Plants become invasive when they threaten wild areas by displacing native vegetation and destroying wildlife habitat. Many of the major problems caused by invasives in other states have not yet been experienced in Alaska. By not planting known invasive species, gardeners can help stop them from spreading in Alaska.

To help guide gardeners in making decisions about what to grow in the garden, the Cooperative Extension Service has developed the following "DON'T Plant in Alaska" list. Plants have been put on the list for a number of reasons. Some have escaped in other states and are known to grow well in parts of Alaska. Some are classified as noxious weeds. Some have a reputation for being aggressive in the garden. Others may belong to a genus of notoriously problematic plants.

## DON'T Plant in Alaska (continued)

### **Orange hawkweed,**

A small clump of orange hawkweed quickly becomes a large, solid mat of hairy leaves

**Japanese knotweed**, (*Reynoutria japonica*),  
(*Reynoutria japonica*), **Bohemian knotweed** (*Reynoutria hybrid*)

Problematic in the Pacific Northwest, Japanese knotweed, and its cousins giant knotweed (*Reynoutria gigantea*), and a hybrid between the two, Bohemian knotweed, are troublesome in Alaska. Local names for these plants include Chinese or Japanese bamboo because of the plant's hollow stems. Many countries have been involved in research to try and eradicate this species where it has taken over. A brochure on Japanese knotweed published by the U.S. Forest Service in Alaska describes the impacts it has on native vegetation and wildlife. Rutgers Cooperative Extension claims Japanese knotweed is one of the most difficult to control species in the home landscape. In Southeast Alaska, large stands exist where plants have escaped cultivation. Plants can also be propagated inadvertently, when pieces of roots or stems are discarded in natural areas or waste places such as gravel pits. To find out more about this invasive (r)7.1 (o)9 (l sp)-3.2 (e)-3.7 (c)-6.2 (i)MC /P Lang (en-US)/MCID:



## DON'T Plant in Alaska (continued)



### St. John's wort,

St. John's wort is planted because of its pharmaceutical properties although for this use it would be much safer to purchase from health food stores. Known as an extremely aggressive weed in the Pacific Northwest, St. John's wort has escaped and/or naturalized in 44 states. It is a perennial that reproduces both by seed and vegetatively. Plants have been found growing in Hoonah, Sitka and Prince of Wales Island. Do not plant St. John's wort in Southeast Alaska and monitor it carefully in Southcentral.

### Creeping buttercup,

Gardeners are well aware of creeping buttercup's aggressive tendencies. The species has escaped in 41 states and in many Alaska locations including Denali National Park, Girdwood, Seward, Homer, Juneau and Kodiak, where gardeners wage war against it on an annual basis. Plants can withstand low mowing when mixed in a lawn. When growing among taller species creeping buttercup grows to two feet. It thrives in moist locations but plants are not fussy. Gardeners in Southeast Alaska should not plant this species and gardeners in other parts of the state should think twice before planting what could become a problem.



### Chokecherry species,

Not all chokecherry species are invasive, but at least two ( *Prunella virginiana* and *Prunella americana* ) have proven highly invasive in all areas of Alaska south of the Arctic Circle. *Prunella virginiana* and *Prunella americana* are commonly known as chokecherry, European bird cherry, and May Day tree. They have spread to natural areas all over the state where planted, and communities with older infestations are taking note of how dense and prolific the species grow. Both species are cyanogenic, which has caused poisoning and death of moose in Anchorage. *Prunella americana* has formed dense stands in Anchorage, Hope and Talkeetna, Alaska, where it is able to shade out native vegetation. *Prunella virginiana* is not known to spread as readily and may serve as an alternative. However, various forms of more edible cherries, including Nanking ( *Prunella salicina* ) and pie cherries, are successfully grown in Alaska and do not spread.

### Siberian peashrub, *Cytisus*

Siberian peashrub is an aggressive, spreading shrub in the pea family. The yellow flowers and fast growth have made it a popular ornamental hedge in Southcentral and Interior Alaska. It has spread to forested areas in Fairbanks, particularly around the University of Alaska campus. Southcentral has seen fewer escaped populations; however, it is thriving where it is growing in Anchorage and other areas.

Not all species that are aggressive in the garden will escape into Alaska's wildlands and become problematic. The following compilation of species are garden flowers, trees and shrubs that should be watched to keep them from spreading. As we learn more about how these species behave in Alaska, our list of invasive garden species not to plant will likely change.



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# Invasive Garden Species to Watch

Not all species that are aggressive in the garden will escape into Alaska's wildlands and become problematic. The following compilation of species are garden flowers, trees and shrubs that should be watched to keep them from spreading. As we learn more about how these species behave in Alaska, our list of invasive garden species not to plant will likely change.

**Oxeye daisy**, *Leucanthemum vulgare*, is often used in non-native wildflower seed mixes and has been planted along roadsides. It is a gangly white daisy, that spreads from areas where it was originally planted in Southcentral Alaska. It is also hardy in the Interior. There are many cultivars of the more ornamental Shasta daisy, *Leucanthemum superbum*, which can be grown. They are not as winter hardy as the oxeye daisy but much better behaved. Another alternative is the native arctic daisy, *Leucanthemum arcticum*.

Another aggressive spreader is **sneezeweed**, a relative of yarrow. Its scientific name is *Anthemum anemoides*. On the Kenai peninsula it is known as Russian daisy. In the garden, this white flower spreads readily by seed. It has escaped and/or become naturalized in 18 states, including Alaska.

Two commonly used groundcovers that have reputations as being weedy Outside include **bishop's goutweed**, *Achillea millefolium* and **spotted deadnettle**, *Lamium maculatum*. Many Alaskan gardeners are raising a red flag about bishop's goutweed, too. It spreads from flower gardens into the lawn and is difficult to eradicate once you decide you don't want it. Spotted dead nettle is more often called by its genus name, *Lamium*. Many new cultivars have been developed in recent years, even though it is a spreader. Both of these species should be watched to make sure they don't escape cultivation.

Growing tight to the ground, **creeping Veronica**, *Veronica repens*, can show up in places where it is not wanted. This species of *Veronica* was once banned from beds at the Alaska Botanical Garden but can still be found growing in the lowland areas.

## Invasive Garden Species to Watch (continued)

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# As gardeners, what can you do?

- Don't plant flowers, trees and shrubs which are known to be invasive.
- Watch species that have the potential to become troublesome and help share information.
- Order from reputable nurseries that are not likely to mislabel plants or sell weedy seed mixes.
- Don't share potential problems with other gardeners.
- When you purchase new plants, watch to make sure you don't introduce weeds hitchhiking in pots or root balls.
- Make sure you don't introduce problems by planting non-native wild flower seed mixes which contain invasive species or weed seeds.

***Human actions are the primary means of invasive species introductions. Gardeners can be part of the solution. Don't plant invasive species intentionally.***



Alaska wild iris

## **Publications:**

"Invasive Plants of Alaska," 2005. AKEPIC – Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clfm the