

What is an exotic plant?

An exotic plant is one that is not native to our area, but which may survive and reproduce here, displacing native species and altering natural systems.

Are all exotics invasive?

No, however, some can cause extreme damage, choking out native plants and trees, reducing the variety of wildlife in an area, and depleting water supplies.

What can I do to help?

- Establish and maintain an adequate buffer zone of native vegetation around all waterbodies.
- Conserve or restore native emergent vegetation along the shoreline.
- Landscape with Florida native plants.
- Learn to recognize invasive exotic plants.
- Be careful when ordering plants online – some invasive exotics can be purchased!
- Eradicate all invasive exotic plants.
- Support programs that promote the above efforts.

Expand your efforts and education:

- Inform others.
- Report sightings of invasive plants to your local agricultural agent or Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).
- Volunteer to help remove exotics from vulnerable natural areas.

Check the following websites for photos and detailed information about exotic plants in Florida.

The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council:
<http://www.fleppc.org/01list.htm>

The Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants:
<http://aquat1.ifas.ufl.edu>

FDEP's Bureau of Invasive Species:
<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/invaspec>

What Can I Do?
<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/seagrant/whatido.html>

Some Local Organizations Concerned With Exotic and Invasive Plants in Walton County:

Walton County Government and the Coastal Dune Lakes Advisory Board:



The CDLAB is comprised of residents and employees of the Walton County Planning Department to ensure the health and environmental integrity of the county's coastal dune lakes.
<http://co.walton.fl.us>

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance:

The Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance is an organization committed to sustaining and providing optimum utilization of the Choctawhatchee Basin watershed.

www.basinalliance.org



UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

UF/IFAS Extension:

Extension is a partnership between state, federal, and county governments to provide scientific knowledge and expertise to the public.

www.ifas.ufl.edu

South Walton Community Council:

The mission of SWCC is to preserve, protect and enhance the quality of life and the natural environment of South Walton County, Florida.

www.southwaltoncc.org



Coastal Dune Lakes of Walton County

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly



Let's understand our environment!



...open your eyes...

Look inside for information about Walton County's rare coastal dune lakes and their ecosystems...

The Good...

Native Plants evolved here and belong here.



Sawgrass

Native plants evolved along with the rest of the native community--bugs, butterflies, fish, birds, mammals--and together they maintain a stable natural balance.



Duck Potato



Swamp Mallow

Wetland plants perform several important ecological functions, including:

- water storage
- water filtration
- food source for wildlife
- habitat for wildlife

...the Bad...

Invasive Exotic Plants disturb the natural balance.



Torpedo grass

Why are invasive exotic plants so bad?

- They compete with native plants for water, sunlight, nutrients, and space.
- They disrupt natural ecosystems by pushing out native plants and animals.
- They alter the food web by changing food availability for plant-dependent wildlife.

What are the characteristics of invasives?

- They tolerate a wide range of environmental conditions (soil type, water level fluctuations, temperature, acidity, and salinity).
- They reproduce early, often, in large numbers, and in multiple ways.
- They grow rapidly.
- They resist management control efforts.



Chinese tallow, a.k.a. Popcorn tree

...and the Ugly

Human Actions can hurt our native ecosystems.



Trash not properly discarded anywhere in the watershed can eventually litter our waterways where it is ugly, toxic, and difficult to remove.



Clearing and/or mowing all the way to the water's edge (foreground) can lead to problems like shoreline erosion, nutrient loading from stormwater runoff, and loss of habitat for critters that live along the water.