
Invasive Species



Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) is an invasive species across all of Canada and much of the United States, including Alaska

Florists, Invasive Species, and Protecting the Natural World

Some plants used in floral design are in fact invasive or problem species.

But what is considered a problem in one region, may not be the same somewhere else. Some problematic species can cause a lot of harm if they escape into the environment and spread.

When they do cause problems, they are called ***invasive*** species.

It is important to note that weeds and invasive plants are not necessarily the same thing.

Weeds are plants growing where they are not wanted.

Not all weeds are invasive, and not all invasive species look like weeds.

Everybody has a role to play in preventing the spread of invasive species. This includes government, industry, and individuals.

Florists, flower farmers, and wholesalers can play an important role in protecting their environment, economy, and community by not buying, selling or promoting invasive species.

Understanding Invasive Species

What are invasive species?

Invasive plants are those that cause ecological or economic harm in an environment where they are not native. This usually happens because of human activities. Humans might move the plant into new areas intentionally or accidentally, or disturb the land in a way that makes it easy for the plant to take hold. Once introduced, the plant can spread through the environment very quickly and have a negative impact.

Invasive species can cause many problems

- Compete with native plants and animals
- Reduce crop production
- Increase expenses for farmers to manage invasive infestations
- Clog waterways
- Increase erosion and siltation of stream banks
- Threaten natural and cultural heritage sites
- Introduce pests and diseases
- Increase forest fire intensity or frequency
- Prevent animals from accessing water and shade
- Reduce the natural beauty and value of the land
- Cause injury, allergies, poisoning, and respiratory problems for humans and animals
- Reduce biodiversity in critically important ecosystems
- impact the mental health of people trying to manage weeds
- Cause increased use of herbicides to control the spread of invasives

How do florists fit into it?

Invasive species appear in the floral industry in different ways.

- Via wholesalers and local flower farmers, who sell the plant because it is not banned from sale or because they do not know the plant is invasive
- Via florists who hand-pick or forage for the variety
- When a plant is moved from an area where it is appropriate, to a region where it is invasive

Unfortunately, social media and the sharing of beautiful images from across the world have made this problem worse by promoting the use of plants that can cause ecological damage.

The role of flower farmers

Flower farmers can also play a role in the spread of invasive species. Harvesting and selling them off their land, as well as growing invasive plants for sale, can contribute to their spread.

How plants spread

Invasive plants spread when parts of the plant that can propagate (become new plants) receive the right conditions for growth. For most plants, this is the seed. However, some varieties can create new plant growth from a small branch or just a fragment of the plant or root. Plant material can spread via florists when the customer takes the material home. Florists can spread it by taking the material into new zones and through disposal methods that enable the propagatable material to spread.

Understanding Invasive Species

Why aren't all invasive species banned from sale and use?

Most countries or regions have a list of plants that are banned from being imported or sold. However, this generally only includes the most harmful varieties for that area. Many more plant species are invasive, but became too widespread before regulation was considered, making regulation an ineffective means of preventing spread. Preventing the introduction of invasive plants is the most cost-effective method of controlling these species. Ensuring that we do not harvest or use any invasive species is one of the best things we can do as members of the flower industry. Everybody has a role to play in preventing the spread of invasive species. This includes government, industry, and individuals.

What can florists, flower farmers, and wholesalers do?

You can prevent the spread of invasive species by taking a few simple steps:

1. Learn about your locally and regionally invasive species.

Not all non-native plants are invasive. Your local municipal authority or community group involved in invasive species management is a great place for learning about what is a problem in your region.

2. Avoid the use and promotion of invasive species.

Stopping the problem from becoming worse is the most powerful thing you can do. Avoid using invasive species and avoid promoting designs or sharing images that feature known invasive species.

3. Destroy all invasive plant material that can grow into new plants.

If you do use an invasive species, it is important to destroy and dispose of the plant material properly. All plant material that can form new plants must be destroyed. This might include flowers, fruits, seeds, roots, and underground tubers or rhizomes. It may also include cuttings of the plant that can take root from a section of the stem.

Understanding the safest means of disposal requires knowledge of each specific plant and how the plant reproduces. Therefore, the best recommendation for floral professionals is to double-bag the plant and put it into the landfill.

4. Get an app for your phone to help with plant identification.

Identifying invasive species can be daunting. Fortunately, there are some great apps available that can assist with plant identification. *iNaturalist* is a great app that can be used worldwide to identify plants and is a joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. *Wild Spotter* is an app used in the US in conjunction with the US Forest Service to help manage and track invasive species.

5. Share your new-found knowledge.

See another floral designer using or promoting invasives? Quietly start a friendly conversation. They might not know that what they're selling is having a harmful impact.

Understanding Invasive Species

Case Study: Pampas Grass

The trend

In recent years, pampas grass (*Cortaderia*) has become very popular as a feature in wedding designs and installations. This trend emerged alongside an increased interest in dried flower arrangements, which appeared as a response to the #nofloralfoam movement. Florists turned to botanical materials that could last out of water.

The plant

The problem with pampas is that it is an invasive species in many countries across the globe. Each seed head carries up to 100,000 seeds. The plant is such a problem that a leading global nature conservation agency has called for urgent action to address the issue. This includes restricting movement of the plant and removal programs to destroy the plants outside of its native South America. Pampas grass is not illegal in North America or Europe, but is illegal to sell in Australia.

The impact

Once in the environment, pampas grass establishes and spreads quickly. In the process it overtakes native plants, impacts biodiversity, creates fire hazards, creates homes for rodents, and can impact our ability to protect the health of forests.



Case Study: Oriental Bittersweet

The trend

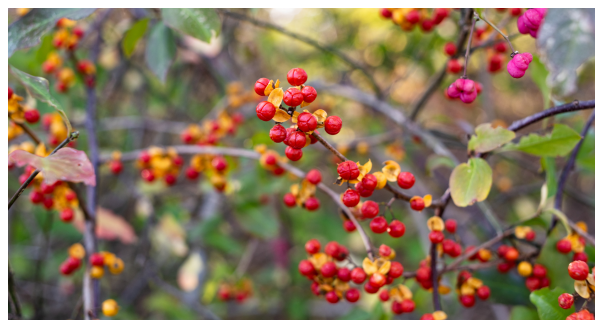
With its pleasing crimson fruits and bright yellow husks, oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) appeals to hobby crafters, wholesalers, and high-end florists. Its usefulness in large-scale installations, as well as its bendability for items such as wreaths, make it desirable for florists. It has become a fall decorating staple across much of North America.

The plant

The problem with Oriental Bittersweet is that it is an invasive species across much of the US and eastern Canada. Oriental Bittersweet grows quickly as a vine and reproduces rapidly underground. It has a twining nature and clings to almost anything it touches. As it grows in diameter, it chokes or 'girdles' other plants and trees, smothering them and uprooting trees.

The impact

Because Oriental Bittersweet can take over large areas quickly, it results in extensive use of herbicides to control its spread. Its presence in the landscape reduces critical biodiversity in forests and can be responsible for loss of trees in forests due to its 'girdling' effects. It also hybridizes with American bittersweet and is forcing (native) American bittersweet to extinction.



Invasive Species Resources

Below are some online resources that provide relevant information on invasive species in North America and Europe/UK. This list is not exhaustive, but hopefully provides a good place to start. Each resource is hyperlinked.

CANADA

[Canadian Council on Invasive Species](#)

[Nature Conservancy of Canada/Invasive Species Centre](#)

[Alberta Native Plant Society](#)

[Plant Watch Canada](#)

[Network of Nature](#)

UNITED STATES

[California Invasive Plant Council](#)

[Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health](#)

[Invasive Plant Atlas of the US](#)

[California Native Plant Society](#)

EUROPE AND THE UK

[European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization](#)

[UK Government](#)

This document was created following a round table discussion initiated by Becky Feasby of Prairie Girl Flowers, Canada, on the 12th of December 2022. Twelve industry and education representatives from around the world were in attendance, with the goal of discussing some strategies to tackle the specific issue of invasive species in floristry. This document includes contributions and input from members of the group. The information and language contained within this document does not reflect the opinions or input from any one member of the group, but should be interpreted as a summary of some general best-practice guidelines around managing invasive plant species, as they apply to florists. Special thanks to Rita Feldman of the Sustainable Floristry Network for her work on this document.

For more information, please reach out to Becky Feasby of Prairie Girl Flowers at hello@prairiegirlflowers.com.