



Kimbell Center News

from Jonathan Dickinson State Park

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With the rainy season in full swing, vegetation is lush in the park. Most of the plants you will encounter in the park are native and play vital roles in their natural communities. Others are exotic species that have significant negative impacts on the ecosystems in which they are found. Exotic species are called 'invasive' when they have the ability to spread to new areas on their own, and negatively impact the areas to which they spread.

Why Fight Invasive Plants?

At first glance, there is nothing alarming about most invasive plants. In fact, some of these exotic plants were introduced through the ornamental plant trade because of their attractive flowers. So why should we seek to control and eliminate them?



Invasive plants displace and crowd out native plants. Wildlife that depend upon particular native species for forage find fewer food sources when invasive plants take over. Other animals require particular species of native plants for their life cycle, and their numbers can decline when these plants are not available. Invasive plants also alter the landscape in a way that can change the flow or retention of water or impact the way a given ecosystem responds to fire.

Problem Plants of JDSP



Downy Rose Myrtle
(*Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*)

This plant is frequently found spreading in pine flatwoods, the most abundant ecosystem found in the park. To eliminate downy rose myrtle, park staff use a technique in which herbicide is applied to the plant's cut stem.

Old World Climbing Fern
(*Lygodium microphyllum*)

This aggressively spreading fern inhabits a variety of wetland natural communities. True to its name, Old World climbing fern aspires to the canopy, covering native plants on its way.



Treatment of this plant can be time consuming in places of severe infestation because portions of the plant that are not sprayed with herbicide will survive. When treating, park staff must cut above the herbicide application line to ensure the top of the plant dies as well.



Natal Grass (*Melinis repens*)

One of the reasons this plant is of particular concern is because it establishes in disturbed areas of the already imperiled scrub ecosystem. Making it especially hard to eradicate is its rebounding nature. An area of natal grass may have to be treated again just six weeks after an initial herbicide application.

Park Efforts



JDSP employs one staff member entirely dedicated to the control of invasive plants. Additionally, the park hosts **AmeriCorps Project A.N.T.** volunteers each year, whose charge is to eradicate non-native plants from public lands. Under the leadership of the Park Biologist, this team goes to battle regularly with the park's unwelcome and damaging plants, using control measures from herbicide application to mechanical removal and prescribed fire.

What You Can Do

Make your outdoor space a refuge for native plants and the wildlife they support.

Do your part to minimize the overall distribution of invasive plants in your

Educate yourself and raise awareness.

The more you know, the more effective you can be at helping native plant communities thrive. Here are some

community by engaging in native-conscious landscaping. The Institute for Regional Conservation's **Natives for your Neighborhood** is a great resource for discovering what plant species naturally occupy the landscape in various zip codes and habitat types in south Florida.

great resources to jump-start your learning:

Florida Invasive Plant Species Mobile Field Guide

FWC Weed Alerts



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