



Invader plants pose a great threat to our country's sensitive ecosystems. A call to action, all gardeners should help eradicate these unwanted guests, writes Franchesca Watson

FATAL ATTRACTION

I HADN'T HEARD a lot about this recently, so I decided to see what has been happening. This is the 'List of Alien Plants' that we have all heard something about, but most of us are a bit baffled by. It's actually called the National Environmental Management and Biodiversity Act and it's a really good thing (check it out on the South African Nursery Association's website).

The idea is nothing new, the first declaration of a noxious weed was spiny cocklebur (*Xanthium spinosum*) in 1860. Since then there has been an alarming deterioration in the country's natural resources due to invasion by alien plants, along with a heightened public awareness with regards to environmental matters.

Basically, a lot of work has gone into listing and classifying problem plants around the country – problem plants being those that threaten/invade natural plant communities or may cause problems in other ways, such as stock or water losses.

Most of these plants produce copious amounts of seeds or have highly efficient means of vegetative reproduction – one has only to see a river choked with wattle to understand the multiple ramifications, like flooding, not to mention the loss of natural flora and fauna species, apart from simple ugliness.

I had a look around my garden – I have a loquat, a jacaranda, a *Ligustrum lucidum* (privet)

and a tipuana that feature on the list, but I have only recently removed a *Ligustrum ovalifolium* hedge, a Spanish broom, which I adored, and I was contemplating planting some cannas. My neighbour has a syringa and a camphor tree; I envy her the syringa.

The Act divides plants into three groups: category one lists those not tolerated in rural or urban areas and which have to be destroyed immediately; two is controlled by area, which means that the plants require a demarcation permit in some areas of SA; three is regulated by activity and requires an individual plant permit for existing plants.

There has recently been some draft legislation (see the *Government Gazette* of 3 April 2009), which makes it clear that there will be authorities put in place to monitor the condition of privately owned land with regard to invasive plants and that the onus will be on landowners to attend to the problem, with relevant penalties for non-compliance. It is apparent that the principle should apply that a landowner cannot sell property in a condition that imposes costs not understood by the purchaser. At present this appears to be aimed at larger portions of land and will obviously affect the values, but eventually I suppose it will all percolate down to the urban plot.

The Working for Water programme is an initiative started in 1995 that partners government departments with local communities with the twofold aim of providing employment and eradicating invasive plants, which has done great work in infested areas. ■ Franchesca Watson ☎ 082 808 1287; South African Nursery Association 🌐 www.sana.co.za/alien-invasive-plants; Working for Water 🌐 www.dwaf.gov.za/wfw

INVADER PERIL

These Category 1 invader plants appear in many gardens. They should be pulled out as seedlings to avoid costly tree felling at a later stage. **1** Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*) This poisonous shrub has invaded fynbos,

urban open spaces and wasteland **2** *Lantana camara* is highly poisonous **3** Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) has spread into watercourses **4** Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) has spread into streams and storm-water drains

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