

Plant invaders

California has about 1,800 nonnative plant species growing in the wild, with about 200 of those considered threats to wilderness areas. Here's a sampling of plants that are considered severe threats to ecosystems in the state, according to the California Invasive Plant Council.

Pampas grass

(*Cortaderia jubata*)

Description:

Native to Latin America; grows in clumps 8 to 10 feet high; invades along the California coast. Introduced as an ornamental.

Impact: Forms dense stands that crowd out native species.

Notes: Produces millions of seeds that do not require fertilization.



Water hyacinth

(*Eichhornia crassipes*)

Description: A free-floating freshwater plant; can range in size from a few inches to more than 3 feet tall. Introduced as an ornamental.

Impact: Clogs waterways, kills fish by reducing oxygen in the water.

Notes: In warm weather, it can double the area it covers every eight to 10 days.



Knapweeds

(*Centaurea maculosa* and related species)

Description: European weed that grows 1 to 3 feet tall. A recent arrival in California.

Impact: Large-scale infestations can reduce native grasses 60% to 90%.

Notes: Most likely introduced to North America in alfalfa seed in the 1890s.



Scotch and French brooms

(*Cytisus scoparius*, *Genista monspessulana*)

Description: Can grow 5 to 10 feet tall; native to Europe and Africa; invades coastal hills and the Sierra foothills. Introduced as ornamental plants.

Impact: Increase the frequency and intensity of wildfires and prevent regeneration of trees after a fire.

Notes: At one time branches were used to make brooms.



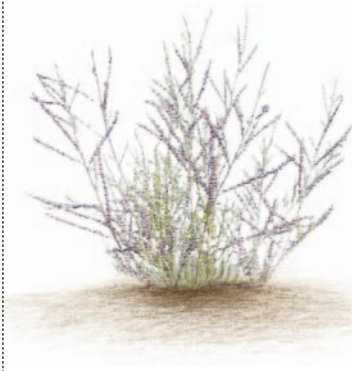
Saltcedar

(*Tamarix ramosissima*)

Description: Shrub or small tree that grows to about 15 feet; native to Europe and Asia. Introduced as an ornamental.

Impact: Can lower the water table. Also concentrates salt in the soil.

Notes: Named for the Tamaris River in Spain.



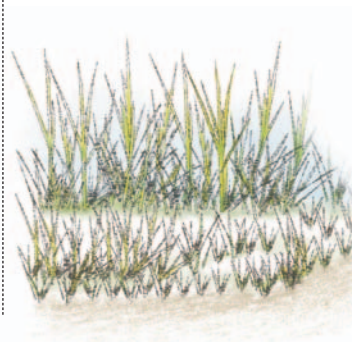
Atlantic cordgrass hybrids

(*Spartina alterniflora x foliosa*)

Description: Perennial grass with 2- to 8-foot stems

Impact: Forms islands in parts of San Francisco Bay. By filling in mudflats, it removes feeding areas for shorebirds.

Notes: Atlantic cordgrass is considered beneficial along its native Atlantic and Gulf coasts.



Yellow starthistle

(*Centaurea solstitialis*)

Description: Winter annual about 30 inches tall; native to Eurasia; grows in valleys, foothills, and mountain regions below 7,000 feet.

Impact: Major problem in native grasslands and pastures, where it is poisonous to livestock.

Notes: Believed to have spread from California ports; reported in Oakland in 1869.



Giant reed

(*Arundo donax*)

Description: A large grass from India that can reach 20 feet.

Impact: Clogs waterways and increases fire danger because of the buildup of dead plant material.

Notes: Removal of giant reed along the Santa Ana River increased the nesting pairs of endangered least bell's vireo from 19 in 1986 to 413 in 2004.

