

Seedlings for Schools Grant Program Common Invasive and Non-Native Plants

While our preference is for your school garden be entirely native, if you plan to make additions to your garden, the primary goal should always be to grow a garden that supports Florida's natural environment. Some plants can be especially detrimental, and unfortunately, these are often readily available at retail garden centers. One of the requirements of this grant is to ensure awardees do not add any plants classified as invasive to Florida. For reference, please consult the current [Florida Invasive Species Council List of Invasive Plant Species](#). Here are some commonly available invasive species to watch out for.



Lantana (*Lantana strigocamara*)

Lantana is a [Category I invasive species](#), which means it is altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives. Unfortunately, it is also widely available in retail stores. Native varieties are sometimes available at nurseries that specialize in native species.



Mexican petunia (*Ruellia simplex*)

Mexican petunia, a Category I invasive in Florida, is widely sold at retail garden centers, but is highly aggressive as it spreads by seed and underground stems. Despite its popularity and vibrant flowers, this plant poses serious ecological risks, including crowding out native plants and reducing biodiversity.



Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta cayennensis*)

The non-native Porterweed (also known as Nettleleaf velvetberry) is often mistaken for the native Blue porterweed (*S. jamaicensis*) as both have distinctive purplish-blue flowers that are born on elongated spikes. *S. cayennensis*, however, is recognized as a [Category II invasive species](#). It should not be used. *S. cayennensis* has a more upright habit, whereas the native species is prostrate and low-growing.



Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*)

While not yet classified as an invasive species, non-native Tropical milkweed is associated with many problems. It is widely available in retail stores, but poses several risks, especially as it is often planted with good intentions to support Monarch butterflies. While it does attract Monarchs, Tropical milkweed can inadvertently harm them by spreading the *OE* parasite, and disrupting migration patterns by providing a year-round food source. [Learn more about these and other impacts of Tropical milkweed here.](#)

We hope your garden blooms and grows for years to come. If you plan to purchase additional native plants, you can find a native nursery in your area by visiting [PlantRealFlorida.org](#). The following resources may also be helpful:

- [Invasive Plant Resources for Florida Residents](#)
- [Native Alternatives to Common Invasive Plants](#)

You can also reapply for another [Seedlings for Schools grant](#).