

Tackling invasive garden plants: a question of prevention

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Summary Deliberately introduced ornamental plants make up at least 30% of Australia's established noxious weed species (of which a portion are also environmental weeds), virtually all of Australia's major water weeds, and 65% of non-native plants that have established in the environment over the past two decades.

The legacy of permitting the import, sale and consequent wide distribution of invasive ornamental plants is epitomised by bridal creeper (*Myrsiphyllum asparagoides* (L.) Willd.). This Weed of National Significance has invaded large tracts of Australia, is implicated in the extinction of four native plant species, and its control has cost governments millions of dollars to date.

The problem of invasive garden plants is set to get worse. The past and continued sale of invasive and potentially invasive garden plants by the nursery industry has created a large pool of serious weeds that are either awaiting their chance to escape from gardens ('sleeper weeds'), or are already invading bushland or agricultural lands.

Despite stark evidence on the economic and environmental costs caused by invasive garden plants,

and the huge risk posed by the large pool of invading and 'sleeper' invasive garden plants, there are inadequate preventative measures in place to ensure this pool of invasive garden plants does not swell further.

While there has been some positive progress in some areas, the overall national response to stabilise and reverse this problem has been patchy, insufficiently coordinated and in many instances reactive in nature. Consequently, there is an urgent need for the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to implement a strong and coordinated national response to the invasive garden plant problem that stresses preventative rather than reactive approaches.

This paper briefly outlines the growing problem of invasive garden plants, reviews government performance in implementing measures to prevent the import, sale, and wide distribution of invasive garden plants, and eradicate new incursions of serious invasive garden plants. It concludes by identifying WWF Australia's preferred policy options to stabilise and reverse the pressing problem of invasive garden plants.

Keywords Garden plants, nursery industry, invasive, government, prevention.