

Invasive Plant Guide for Los Altos Hills

Invasive plants crowd out native plants thereby reducing essential food and shelter for our native birds, insects, and wildlife. Thistles, stinkwort and French broom increase fire risk either through flammable resin or by creating fuel ladders. The plants shown in table below are especially aggressive, expanding infestation area each year unless controlled. Reduction of invasive plants requires attention from all residents through annual maintenance.

Key Tips:

- Annual maintenance can significantly reduce invasive populations in 3-5 years.
- Alert Public Works for roadside infestations.
- Don't create highly disturbed areas (broadcast herbicide, discing, goats) as weeds will take over unless followed by comprehensive replanting plan.
- Plant native wildflowers, grasses and shrubs to suppress weeds from emerging. Late fall and winter are the best seasons to establish new plants.
- Apply thick layer of mulch to suppress weeds from emerging.
- Not sure about plant ID? Use free smart phone app iNaturalist or Seek.

Construction Sites as Invasive Seed Source: Imported gravel and materials for construction sites often contain invasive seeds, especially stinkwort and thistles. Truck tires also are a vector for invasive seeds. Yearly management of invasive plants on construction sites is recommended to reduce spread into neighboring properties.

Common Invasive Plants in Los Altos Hills (but there are many more...)


	<p>Tree of Heaven (<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>) https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/ailanthus-altissima-profile/</p> <p>Highly invasive tree that can grow three feet a year. Roots are poisonous to neighboring trees. In the fall season, apply basal bark herbicide. Cutting without herbicide results in profuse root sprouting. Spreads by seeds and creeping roots.</p>
	<p>Italian Thistle (<i>Carduus Pycnocephalus</i>) https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/carduus-pycnocephalus-profile/</p> <p>Hand pull in winter and spring before flowering. Okay to leave plant in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If plant has flowered, remove entire plant and dispose in yard waste bin. String trimmer at onset of flowering will greatly reduce populations but not eliminate. Spreads by seeds. Creates fuel ladder.</p>

Photo: Bob Case

Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

Invasive Plant Guide for Los Altos Hills



Photo: © 2008 Neal Kramer

Purple Starthistle (*Centaurea Calcitrapa*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/centaurea-calcitrapa-profile/>

Hand pull rosette in winter and spring before flowering. Okay to leave in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If plant has flowered, remove entire plant and dispose in yard waste bin. Spreads by seeds.



Photo © 2014 Neal Kramer

Yellow Starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/centaurea-solstitialis-profile/>

Hand pull in winter and spring before flowering. Okay to leave in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If plant has flowered, remove entire plant and dispose in yard waste bin. String trimming at onset of flowering will greatly reduce populations but not eliminate. Proliferates in disturbed areas. Spreads by seeds which are short lived.






Photo: © 2015 Neal Kramer

Stinkwort (*Dittrichia graveolens*) <https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/dittrichia-graveolens-profile/>

Warning: Plant resin can cause rash and is flammable. Pull in spring and summer with gloved hand and dispose entire plant in yard waste bin. Flowers near autumn equinox. String trimming before flowering will reduce populations but not eliminate. Herbicide is effective but only before flowering, apply before August. Spreads by seeds. Proliferates in disturbed areas. Commonly found along roadsides and construction sites.

Invasive Plant Guide for Los Altos Hills

	<p>French Broom (<i>Genista monspessulana</i>) https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/genista-monspessulana-profile/</p> <p>Hand-pull small plants in winter and spring when ground is moist. Cut larger plants and apply herbicide to cut. Okay to leave plant in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. Spreads by seeds. Seeds remain viable for decades, emerging year after year. A single bush produces thousands of seeds each year. Creates fire fuel ladder under trees. See also Scotch Broom and Spanish Broom, cal-ipc.org</p>
	<p>Bermuda Buttercup (<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>) https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/oxalis-pes-caprae-profile/</p> <p>Very difficult to control. Smother with cardboard or similar. Herbicide effective with multiple applications. Spreads by many persistent bulbs and rhizomes, emerging in winter and spring. Hand pulling reduces populations but does not eradicate and can inadvertently spread blubs to new locations. Dispose all parts of plant in yard waste bin.</p>
	<p>Milk Thistle (<i>Silybum marianum</i>) https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/silybum-marianum-profile/</p> <p>ID by large (up to 3ft) variegated green and white rosettes with purple flower. Can grow up to 6 feet in height. Hand pull in winter and spring before flowering. Okay to leave in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If plant has flowered, remove entire plant and dispose in yard waste bin. Spreads by seeds which can remain viable for up to 9 years.</p>

All photos used with permission.

Learn more about invasive plant management by participating in a workday with Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District, Peninsula Open Space Trust, or Grassroots Ecology. Reference the CA Invasive Plant Council website for a full list of invasive plants and more information on identification and control, cal-ipc.org.

Questions? openspacecommittee@losaltoshills.ca.gov