

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.
- 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.

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.

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Common Invasive Plants in Los Altos Hills



Photo: Bob Case

Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/ailanthus-altissima-profile/>

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.



Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

Italian Thistle (*Carduus Pycnocephalus*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/carduus-pycnocephalus-profile/>

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.



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.

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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: Joseph DiTomaso

Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/conium-maculatum-profile/>

Biennial forb spreads easily in moist, disturbed areas. Grows 4 to 6 feet in height with many small white flowers. Distinguishable from native cow parsnip by variegated purple stem. Plant is poisonous and can cause dermatitis. Spreads by seeds only. Pull out root with gloved hand or tool. Cutting is ineffective unless combined with herbicide.



Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

Cape Ivy (*Delawarea Odorata*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/delairea-odorata-profile/>

Long vines (30 ft) form dense mats in riparian and woodland habitats smothering plants underneath. Clustered yellow flowers bloom in winter. Manual removal of all roots and plant material before seeds set. Cutting is ineffective unless combined with herbicide.

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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.



Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

French Broom (*Genista monspessulana*) <https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/genista-monspessulana-profile/>

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



Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

Bermuda Buttercup (*Oxalis pes-caprae*) <https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/oxalis-pes-caprae-profile/>

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.

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Photo: © 2008 Neal Kramer

Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/silybum-marianum-profile/>

Identify 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.



Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

Periwinkle (*Vinca major*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/vinca-major-profile/>

A spreading perennial vine with dark green leaves and purple flower. Vinca has escaped from gardens and is rapidly spreading into wild areas, especially shady riparian habitats and moist woodlands. Spreads through rooting stems. Pulling is effective if all stems, roots and stolons are removed. Cutting is not recommended as stem pieces may root.



Photo: Joseph DiTomaso

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)

<https://www.cal-ipc.org/plants/profile/hedera-helix-profile/>

A vigorous perennial vine with dark green leaves. Spreads rapidly in forests inhibiting native understory. Pulling is effective if all plant parts are removed. Cutting or mowing is not recommended as each piece could root unless followed with herbicide. Gloves recommended as plant may cause dermatitis.

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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