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SCOTCH BROOM / FRENCH BROOM
Cytisus scoparius / Genista monspessulana

YELLOW STARThistle / Distaff Thistle
Centaurea solstitialis

JURAHAAD
Teucrium broom Apache root

OSBLONG SPURGE
Euphorbia oblongata

ITALIAN THISTLE
Centaurea cyanus

GIANT REED
Arundo donax

BARBED GOATGRASS
Aegilops triuncialis

Previously called German Ivy, this species came from South Africa and invaded coastal and stream-side plant communities. It is a fast growing vine that can reseed from any portion of the plant, including each node (or joint) on the stem. This enables the plant to spread rapidly after floods or landslides. Cape ivy forms dense blankets of vegetation, smothering surrounding plants. The loss of native vegetation along invaded rivers and streams is degrading California’s most sensitive songbird and salmon habitats. Cape ivy leaves are bright green and waxy, with no tendrils or spines at the nodes. It is commonly confused with native wild cucumbers, a vine that produces early tendrils and spiny fruits.

Imported into California as ornamental shrubs, these escaped landscape plants become destructive pests along the Pacific coast and in the Sierra foothills. Brooms rapidly colonize open and disturbed areas, and they invade undisturbed grassland and forest habitats. Brooms add nitrogen to the soil, causing changes that transform landscapes. The flowers and seeds of brooms are toxic or unpleasant to humans, livestock and native browsers. These species increase fire hazards, choking trails, and decrease visibility along roadways. Brooms typically have yellow, pea-like flowers although pink and peach varieties are commonly sold at nurseries.

This highly competitive annual grass causes major economic damage for California ranchers and severely degrades grassland habitat. It has a high silica content and long, stiff stems, making it very unpalatable to cattle and native browsers. In some areas, it has been estimated that medusahead infestations have lowered the carrying capacity of the range by close to 75%. This grass also degrades very slowly, often forming dense mats that crowd out more desirable species. Medusahead matures later than most other annual grasses, and is easiest to spot during late spring or early summer.

This perennial grass species has infected thousands of acres throughout California. Although it is primarily found in stream habitats, it can also be found in frost shaded upland sites. Root or stem fragments can be carried and re-established down-stream. Therefore, it has taken over many of California’s stream systems and flood control channels, forming enormous monocultures with virtually no food or habitat value for native wildlife. Giant reed also decreases water availability, and increases the likelihood of fire and flooding. Giant reed has 1.2 foot tall, plane-like flower heads and alternating leaves that grow up to 3 feet long. It is commonly mistaken for bamboo as it forms robust clumps of canes, 10 to 30 feet tall.

This annual plant has become one of the most prominent invasive weeds in California, infesting over 14 million acres throughout the state. It is extremely competitive, invasive, agricultural lands, increasing farming costs, and reducing productivity. Yellow starthistle has degraded thousands of well-drained acres, crowding out native plants and reducing the habitat value for wildlife. It is also toxic to horses. This species is frequently spread in contaminated livestock forages, by heavy equipment and vehicles, and by bikes, hikers, and equestrians. In the summer it can be recognized by the large thorns that grow immediately below its yellow flower heads.

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This annual thistle grows in dry, open areas such as pastures, rangelands, right-ways, and grasslands. On grazed lands, Italian thistle can reduce productivity by physically interfering with grazing and by displacing desired native and non-native grasses. In wildland settings, Italian thistle rapidly colonizes small disturbances such as gopher mounds, eventually developing dense stands that can out-compete native plant species. Italian thistle is recognized by its leaves, woolly white below, hairless green above, and spines on each leaf. A Rhinocyllus coptiformis has been introduced as a bio-control agent, but it is not yet providing the desired level of control.

This Mediterranean native is an aggressive rangeland pest. It displaces desirable native and non-native forage plants. Distaff thistle has spring flower heads, and the leaves have long, stout marginal spines that make this plant a painful insider, reducing forage movement through grasslands for both livestock and humans. It is a winter annual, germinating in fall but not maturing until the following summer. A single plant is capable of producing 10,000 seeds that can be rapidly spread by wind, animals, and vehicles. It has been known to eradicate the mouths of grazing livestock and cause lameness in animals whose hooves have been penetrated by its spines.

This evergreen, prickly shrub dominates native scrub, grasslands and rangelands along the Northern California coast. Traditionally planted to establish hedges, it can form thick, impenetrable thickets that offer little forage or habitat value. It is extremely flammable and poses significant fire hazards that increase over time. Similar to invasive broom species, gorse seeds remain dormant in the soil for many decades, germinating and sending up a profusion of new plants after fires or soil disturbances. Gorse is a dense, yellow flowering member of the pea family that is easily recognized by its prickly stems.

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WHAT IS AN INVASIVE WEED?

An “invasive weed” is any species of plant that is, or is liable to become, detrimental, or destructive to agriculture, silviculture, or native ecosystems. They are aggressive, competitive, and difficult to control or eradicate. They reduce native plant diversity, diminish the value of native habitats and threaten the ecological integrity of our precious wildlands. Invasive weeds increase fire danger, and are a costly problem for farmers, ranchers, and landowners.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

• Learn to distinguish native plants from non-native invasive weeds.
• Do not be tempted by attractive flowers from other states or counties.
• Do not start new weed outbreaks for up to 10 years.
• Always check your vehicle, shoes, and pets for seeds, flower arrangements, nursery stock and equipment that hidden seeds may be present and start new weed outbreaks for up to 10 years.
• Visit the Weed Management Area web site for more information on how to control weeds
• Do not spread weed seedlings into the state or county.
• Always check your vehicle, shoes, and pets for weeds or seeds when leaving an infested site.