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Eradicating exotics a mission of love at San Luis

Deborah Lawson, UF/Leon County Extension 2:25 p.m. EDT July 28, 2016



(Photo: UF/IFAS Leon County Extension)

“You mean that pretty plant is invasive? It hasn’t spread in my yard!” If I’ve heard this once, I’ve heard it 1,000 times, and I know, I sound like a broken record player... ”It may not be spreading in your well-kept yard, but the birds eat it and spread it everywhere.”

Invasive coral ardesia at Mission San Luis.



Invasive coral ardesia at Mission San Luis. (Photo: Deborah Lawson)

Seriously, the germination rate for coral ardesia is 86 to 98 percent. Almost every berry you see will be another plant. It’s the same story with Chinese privet, Chinese tallow, Japanese climbing fern, heavenly bamboo (nandina domestica), and the multitude of other plants on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council’s list at www.fleppc.org.

Pretty – yes, but do they belong here? Resoundingly no! They take over our woodlands and choke out our native species. What will be left when these plants are all we can see in the landscape?



Master Gardener volunteers at Mission San Luis. (Photo: Photo by Deborah Lawson.)

If you don't believe me, take a trip out to one of our local park trails, or better yet, go off the typical path at Mission San Luis and see what is taking over the beautiful natural woodlands there. It is a reservoir for invasive plants and it won't take a minute before you realize you are surrounded by the bright red berries of *Ardisia crenata* (coral ardisia) – that is, unless it's an area that volunteer Master Gardeners and horticultural students have already cleared through their hard work digging up the fast growing roots of these invasive plants. I walk past several Master Gardener volunteers from Leon County, led by my former mentor, Glenn Mayne, and think, "this is an endless task. How do these few volunteers see this through to the end?"

On this beautiful Saturday morning it is already warming, and luckily the Master Gardeners are joined by a few students from Steve Chandler's Park Management class at FAMU and Professor Chandler himself. I ask myself, what makes someone give up their Saturday to clean up these woods? Passion does – a passion for preserving what we have been given.



Professor Chandler at Work. (Photo: Photo by Deborah Lawson.)

Thanks many times over to these volunteers and to volunteers in general. Knowing that in giving of ourselves and our time we also receive great abundance is one of life's best-learned lessons.

Mission San Luis is a magical place. You can stand in the Council House and feel the spirit of those who came before us, the organized lives that they lived in community with each other. You feel the same when you stand in the Mission houses and buildings. Perhaps with a lot of help, we shall one day reclaim the woodlands there as well.

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