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## Newsroom

Georgia Southern University

[Home](#) > [Press Releases](#) > Georgia Southern University Expert: Think 'Green' When Choosing Plants for Your Home

# Georgia Southern University Expert: Think 'Green' When Choosing Plants for Your Home

APRIL 19, 2010

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With Earth Day on the horizon, many people are thinking about environmentally-friendly steps such as recycling, using energy-efficient light bulbs and bicycling or walking instead of driving.

However, as people enjoy the spring weather by working in their gardens and yards, they may not be thinking about the damage they could do by selecting the wrong plants. A Georgia Southern University expert reminds you to be careful not to select plants that could harm the environment.

"Plant beautiful flowers and shrubs, but be careful what you choose! Some non-native species can become aggressive invaders that can take over a forest, alter plant communities and even change the levels of nutrients in the soil," said Lissa Legee, director of the Center for Sustainability in the Allen E. Paulson College of Science and Technology.

Invasive species are alien species whose introduction or spread threatens the environment, the economy and even human health. The plants originate somewhere else but then thrive in their new area, where they can take over local species.

"Invasive species are second only to habitat destruction as a threat to native biodiversity," Legee said.

To illustrate how an invasive plant can take over a forest, Legee and some of her students have conducted a study over the past 11 years. It started in 2000 with a graduate student class studying coral ardisia, a small shrub native to Asia often called the Christmas berry. The ardisia is known for its ability to shade out native plants, preventing their growth and development.

The students censused the entire population of coral ardisia on property belonging to the Georgia Southern University Botanical Garden, where a resident of a neighboring house had apparently tossed the plant into the yard. At the time, only 144 individual plants were located in the roughly 6,000-square-foot area.

Since then, each of Legee's Biology of Plants classes has surveyed the population to learn about plant population ecology and recorded the number of plants present. This year Legee decided the experiment had gone on long enough, so her class pulled out the plants. The total came to a whopping 7,469 individual plants, almost 6,000 of which were small seedlings, started from the seeds produced by the older plants.

For more information on plants that pose threats to natural areas in Georgia, visit <http://www.gainvasives.org/gaweeds.cfm>.

For media interested in stories related to Earth Day, the directors of Georgia Southern's Center for Sustainability and the Environmental Sustainability Division are available for interviews about the University's "green" initiatives.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers 115 degree programs serving 19,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia's largest, is a top choice of Georgia's HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education.

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"O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree..." 🎄🎵#TBT to circa 1964, when a tree in front of the Williams Center was decorated for the holidays.



16h

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