

# New Species for the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's 2013 List of Invasive Plant Species



The FLEPPC List of Invasive Plant Species was updated in 2013 with the addition of five species: one in Category I, *Ludwigia hexapetala*, and four in Category II, *Eulophia graminea*, *Macroptilium lathyroides*, *Momordica charantia* and *Richardia grandiflora*. The entire list can be viewed on the FLEPPC website at: [www.fleppc.org/list/list.htm](http://www.fleppc.org/list/list.htm)

## Category I

### *Ludwigia hexapetala*

(Uruguayan waterprimrose)

Florida has about 30 species of *Ludwigia*, all known for their clear yellow flowers with 4 to 5 sepals and petals. You may find *Ludwigia hexapetala* listed as a synonym of *L. grandiflora*, probably because



Uruguayan waterprimrose penetrates beds of pickerelweed and giant bulrush off the western shore of Lake Tohopekaliga. Photo by Keshav Setaram, SFWMD.

the two are difficult to tell apart. *Ludwigia hexapetala*, however, is not native to central Florida where, since 2011, it has usurped native communities in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, and probably elsewhere. While both species have petioles longer than the hypanthium, *L. hexapetala* has slightly larger sepals and petals, overall longer and wider (more lanceolate) leaves, and less hairy, more glabrous leaves and stems than *L. grandiflora*.

Identification becomes problematic when the floral characters overlap and/or when leaf shape and degree of surface hairs vary from change in plant growth stage or aquatic environment. Use of an entire population, rather than individual specimens, may be needed

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as well as chromosome karyotyping to distinguish the two. *Ludwigia hexapetala* is native to South America, but it is not understood if early records from the southeastern states (1844 and 1864) imply its nativity or introduction to South Carolina in 1844 and Georgia in 1864. With certainty, *L. hexapetala* was introduced to France in the 1840s and later Spain and Belgium. More recent records for Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Arizona and the Pacific Coast indicate movement by humans across nature's geographical barriers.



Emergent rosettes of *Ludwigia hexapetala* on Lake Harney.  
Photo by Kelli Gladding, FWC.



Pollen bearing flower of *Ludwigia hexapetala* on Lake Harney. Photo by Kelli Gladding, FWC.

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**Category II species continued on next page.**

## Category II

### *Eulophia graminea*

(Chinese crown orchid)

*Eulophia graminea* is a terrestrial orchid native to Asia that was first discovered in 2007 growing in mulched landscape in south Miami. Mature individuals have large pseudobulbs whereas smaller individuals can have smaller pseudobulbs and numerous root attachments, making them more difficult to extract. Leaves are narrow and flowers form in tall panicles and are green with brownish purple venation with a rose purple marking on the lip. The fruit is a capsule approximately 3 cm in length. Plants grow to a height of one meter.



*Eulophia graminea* forms a dense monoculture and has rapidly spread to thirteen counties in Florida. Although believed to have originally been spread by mulch, *E. graminea* is now found in rockland hammock and pine rockland habitats in the Florida Keys, and maritime hammock, pine flatwood, coastal strand, and cypress strand on the mainland. *E. graminea* has been found growing in rock, sand, mulch and bare earth.

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## Category II

### *Macroptilium lathyroides*

(phasey bean)

*Macroptilium lathyroides* is native to tropical America and is a member of the Fabaceae family. Plants form dense monocultures and grow erect to a height of approximately 0.5 meters. The leaves are compound with three leaflets per leaf, and red to purple flowers develop on long stalks. The flower petals are uneven with the wing petals being larger than the lower petals. Fruits develop as paired long pods that split open when mature; they contain numerous wind-dispersed seeds.



*Macroptilium lathyroides* has spread throughout Florida and has become increasingly abundant in the Florida Keys, particularly along the U.S. 1 corridor. However, *M. lathyroides* has also been observed forming dense monocultures in tidal marsh, beach dune, coastal berm and ruderal areas in the Florida Keys.

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## Category II

### *Momordica charantia*

(balsam apple, balsam pear)

*Momordica charantia* was first identified as escaping cultivation in 1993 (Maguire & Hammer letter). Initially seen mostly in disturbed areas, the list of vouchered specimens has expanded to 30 Florida counties as of 2013 (<http://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/>). Its range extends through central and south Florida (south of Putnam and Pasco counties), and hops across the panhandle into Leon and Escambia counties. This vine is in the cucumber family and originates from the Old World tropics in Africa. Label data from vouchered specimens describe it as covering shrubs, and comingling with rare air plants in tall trees. It grows in sunny areas along ditch banks, firebreaks, and fence lines, but is also a bane to land managers in restoration areas as it spreads through tree gaps after prescribed burns and invasive plant removal. The vines compete with native vegetation as groundcover and can form dense thickets.



Increased occurrence records and comments from land managers resulted in Category II invasive plant status in 2013.

Plant communities where balsam pear has been observed include: scrub, maritime and mesic hammocks, pinelands, beach dune, coastal strand, shell midden, wet flatwoods, floodplain swamp and edges of freshwater swamps. This pioneer species gets shaded out in intact mature hammocks. The fruits and leaves are used medicinally but the seeds are toxic.

Because exposed seeds have a bright red aril, balsam pear is likely mammal and bird dispersed. Sometimes called “stink vine,” the unpleasant smell from handling the plant washes off with water.

*Text by Chris Lockhart ([chris@lockharts.org](mailto:chris@lockharts.org)). Photo by Patricia Howell ([powell@broward.org](mailto:powell@broward.org)).*

## Category II

### *Richardia grandiflora*

(large flower Mexican clover)

*Richardia grandiflora* has been on the radar screen for the invasive plant list since 1999. The common name is large-flower Mexican clover (a misnomer – it originated from South America). Initially considered a species found just in disturbed edges, an increasing volume of occurrence records in natural areas raised concerns and promoted it to the rank of a Category II invasive plant in 2013. There currently are voucherized specimens from 21 Florida counties, from Volusia and Hillsborough counties, southward (<http://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/>).



The full extent of its range is uncertain because it also has been seen in the coastal strand community of a national seashore in the western panhandle (Escambia County). This member of the coffee family (Rubiaceae) has invaded scrub, pine rocklands, prairie, coastal strand and beach dune plant communities. Label data from voucherized specimens describe scattered plants to dense patches that grow with or crowd out native endemic plants such as *Selaginella arenicola*, *Asclepias curtisii*, *Lechea* spp., *Conradina grandiflora* and others. This sprawling herb with a deep central tap root returns readily after fire and becomes established where there is open, bare ground. It moves into natural areas from edges, trails and fire breaks by natural means of dispersal. Mowers and other equipment appear to be dispersal vectors, causing lawns and natural areas to form low mounds of flower “snow.”

*Text by Chris Lockhart ([chris@lockharts.org](mailto:chris@lockharts.org)), Patricia Howell, and Roger Hammer. Photo by Patricia Howell.*