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How You Can Help Stop the Silent Invasion

1. Protect Hawaii—Don't Plant a Pest

More than half of the invasive plants that are threatening Hawaii's forests and natural areas started off as ornamental plants in yards and gardens and landscaping. Some of the most popular ornamentals of yesterday and today (including miconia, fountain grass, Australian tree fern and strawberry guava) are spreading through the forest and replacing native plants and the animals that depend on them. You can help protect Hawaii by asking for native or non-invasive plants. Your choices at plant nurseries, garden shops and plant sales can make a difference in forests and natural areas. You can also look plants up online to see if they might be bad for the environment. Google the plant name and the word "invasive" to see if it is causing problems in Hawaii or elsewhere.

2. Protect Hawaii—Don't Pack a Pest

In Hawaii there is a tradition of bringing presents back from overseas to give to friends and family, and oftentimes it is food. However, we rarely think about the possibility that these omiyage (gifts) could be carrying harmful insects or plant diseases that will harm agriculture or forests. Help protect Hawaii by declaring all items listed on agriculture forms such as fruits, plants and even soil and sand so that they can be inspected for unwanted pests. Items will be inspected and most times they are returned to you.

3. Protect Hawaii—Report a Pest

Do you know whom to call if you see a snake in Hawaii? They may be illegal to import or possess in our islands (the Zoo has a special permit), yet there were 236 snake sightings reported Statewide between 1990 and 2000 and less than half were captured or turned in. A new, toll-free pest hotline system has been instituted, 643-PEST (643-7378), and you can help protect Hawaii by reporting illegal species such as snakes and unusual insects as quickly as possible. This number may also be called to turn in illegal pets without fear of prosecution under the State's amnesty program. Coqui frogs should be reported to the Big Island Invasive Species Committee at 961-3299.

4. Protect Hawaii—A Living Reef Gives Hawaii Life

Invasive marine plants and animals are a relatively new concept. There has been a rise in cases of alien aquarium species found not just in the streams, but also on Hawaii's reefs. Invasive seaweed introduced for aquaculture purposes in the 1970s can be spread when seaweed pieces are moved from infested reefs (like Hilo Bay and Onekahakaha Beach Park on Hawaii and Waikiki Beach on Oahu) on dive and snorkeling gear to more pristine areas such as the Kona Coast and Hanauma Bay. People can help protect Hawaii's reefs by washing their snorkeling equipment, dive gear and boats before moving to a new spot. We can also help protect our streams and oceans by never releasing pets or dumping aquariums into streams or the ocean.

The Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) is a statewide partnership of more than 14 government agencies and NGOs working together since 1995 to change policy, improve communications and collaborations, and promote public awareness in an effort to protect Hawaii from invasive species.

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