

WEED OF THE WEEK OCTOBER 1, 2008

FEATURED SPECIES: SMOKEBUSH (*Buddleja madagascariensis*)

Many people who visit the KISC educational booth at community events often comment about how beautiful some of the invasive species are that we have as photographs in our display. This week's featured weed is always an eye catcher at our booth and has been widely cultivated around the globe for its striking appearance. **Smokebush**, with its bright orange flowers, reminiscent of lilacs, reminds us that many of our invasive species are plants that we chose for their superficial qualities, without considering their deeper and ecological consequences. But, I think most of us would agree that there is more to our forest than just a pretty face.

Like many of its invasive counterparts, Smokebush doesn't tend to share when it escapes the garden into natural ecosystems. It grows much more quickly than its surrounding native neighbors (*slow down this ain't the mainland...except Smokebush is actually from Madagascar...*), out-competing them for space and resources. Because Smokebush was cultivated on Kaua'i near some of our most treasured natural areas in Koke'e State Park, its naturalization is a bit worrisome and problematic for the stewards of this place.

Koke'e Resource Conservation Program (KRCP) has made Smokebush one of its priority targets and recently utilized some hefty help to go after the core of the infestation. The staff from the Invasive Species Committees (ISC) on Big Island, Maui, Moloka'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i teamed up, totaling over 60 weed warriors strong, to remove 1,701 Smokebush from the premises. Katie Cassel, coordinator for KRCP, was amazed with the results. Cassel said that local cabin leaseholders had noticed Smokebush spreading much further and more rapidly than ever before. The ISC crews covered over 25 acres, a feat that would not have been feasible for KRCP's small crew and volunteers.

Smokebush also demonstrates the importance of cooperation between conservation and the nursery industry. It doesn't make very much sense for our community if groups are working hard in the mountains to remove a species, and then that very same species is being sold and planted below. With this in mind, the Kaua'i Landscaping Industry Council wanted to join in the effort and voluntarily agreed to stop selling Smokebush, and its cousin Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja davidii*) as well.

Smokebush is a sprawling shrub that has wooly stems and leaves that grow opposite one another. The orange flowers that form into a cylinder are its signature. Butterfly Bush has pink-purple flowers. Each Smokebush plant produces many seeds that can travel long and far from its original cultivation

site, because birds gobble up the fruits and drop them off elsewhere. It especially likes disturbed sites and will take off and take over from there.

We have talked before about the relationship between the farm and the forest on KKCR, about how they both require care and that diversity is vital to their sustainability. Volunteering in Koke`e to remove things like Smokebush is the perfect way to experience true “forest gardening.” You will have the opportunity to see gorgeous native plants and ecosystems found nowhere else in the entire world. In our garden or on the farm, we often remove weeds so that more “desirable plants,” like our food crops, can survive. To our community and future generations, we must remember that our native plants are desirable, and they need our help. When you remove invasive species in Koke`e, you could be taking a weed out of the ground before it crowds out an endangered species, helping that unique individual to survive.

And that’s what the Weed of the Week is all about. It’s about getting “Back to the Garden” not only our own yards, but also to the island garden that we share. It needs us as much as we need it. And, it’s going to take the work of field crews, scientists, teachers, volunteers, businesses, farmers, and gardeners to prevent the spread of invasive species. Each of us can play a significant role in taking care of places like Koke`e. If you would like to volunteer for KRCP, please email rcp@aloha.net or call 335-0045. If you haven’t already, meet the native Hawaiian forest. There is truly nothing like it in the whole world.

NATIVE GARDEN ALTERNATIVE:

If you discover Smokebush in your garden, take out the invasive beast and bring in a native beauty. Kaua’i’s own endemic Kokio is one of a kind. After you volunteer in Koke`e and fall in love with Hawaiian flora, Kokio will be a must have for your native plant garden. Yes, Smokebush has got some pretty flowers, but Kokio’s brilliant orange hibiscus will take your breath away. It’s rare, it’s Hawaiian, and by planting it in our garden, we are contributing to the preservation of biodiversity rather than its loss. Want to learn more? Check out Rick Barboza’s “In the Garden” article on Kokio.

<http://archives.starbulletin.com/2008/07/18/features/garden.html>