



Stephen &amp; Kristin Pategas

## in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

### Riff Raff Plants

Tali shared her lament as soon as we answered the phone, "I have had it with these riff raff plants in my backyard." We had never used that term before, but instantly knew what she meant and sympathized. Our travels to provide consultations and landscape designs bring us face to face with freaked out homeowners and challenging plants. These plants are seductive cheap first dates, cover lots of ground, become aggressive, bully others out of the way and ultimately - they bite the hand that feeds and waters them. Any hopes for an attractive low maintenance garden are dashed. Lock the door, draw the drapes, and forget about entertaining anyone with close to 20/20 vision.

Who are these interlopers, where did they come from, and how in the heck can we get rid of them? The answers start with the fact that some are invasives from other parts of the world brought here by humans, some are "vigorous" natives, and all of them are persona non grata in our garden and the ones we design. Apply the tried and true mantra - "right plant right place - wrong plant get the shovel." However, since these plants could easily outlast any human competing on Survivor and would snicker at a restraining order, a session with some weed killer may be in order.

Many of these plants have been identified by the Florida Exotic Plant Pest Council, otherwise known as FLEPPC.

Check them out at: <http://www.fleppc.org>. The bad guys that keep us up at night include:

- **Cinnamomum camphora/Camphor tree** - shows up uninvited when a bird makes a deposit, then seedlings sprout everywhere organic matter exists.
- **Clerodendrum species** - planted for its flowers, it travels underground and sprouts in the next county.
- **Colocasia esculenta/Elephant ear** - planted for its large bold foliage and quickly outgrows its welcome. Use the nursery grown cultivars instead.
- **Nephrolepis cordifolia/Sword fern** - shows up uninvited or is planted because someone (an enemy?) offered a freebie. Then it runs and spreads like crazy into plant beds and every crevice. Use the clumping holly fern instead.
- **Parthenocissus quinquefolia/Virginia creeper vine** - an innocuous arrival native to Florida and other states climbs and smothers trees to show its dominance as it rains down seeds from on high.
- **Prunus laurifolia/Cherry laurel tree** - seedlings appear everywhere; add 10% to your maintenance budget.
- **Paederia foetida/Skunk vine** - must be a hyper-adaptable vine that Star Trek's USS Enterprise brought back from another galaxy. It climbs and smothers and even creeps in lawns.
- **Ruellia tweediana/Mexican petunia** - is a lovely, purple blossoming mirage when planted, but it becomes a recurring nightmare. Add 15% to the budget.
- **Sapium sebiferum/Chinese tallow** - is loved for its fall foliage color, but everyone hates pulling the hundreds of seedlings which also show up in natural areas. Yes, the seeds eaten by birds exit their digestive tracts viable and ready to party hearty.

Tali's garden demons were exorcised with due diligence and she is well on her way to the garden of her dreams.



Virginia creeper heading upward to smother a palm.



Holly fern - *Cyrtomium falcatum* is a good clumping fern substitute.



Sword fern even spreads into palm tree boots.



Mexican petunia is a colorful nasty nuisance.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.