

Jumping the fence

A long-term citizen science project is enlisting gardeners to help provide early warning signs of what may become invasive plants in the future.

Via 'Plant Alert', gardeners can report ornamental plants that are showing signs of invasiveness. Data is reviewed by researchers at Coventry University and the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, who hope to close the 'invasion debt gap' – the time between a plant being introduced into gardens and it escaping into the wider environment. It will also help produce risk assessments of species, and provide gardeners and nurseries with advice on which plants may also become difficult to manage in garden situations.

Plant Alert Co-ordinator Katharina Dehnen-Schmutz said, 'Ornamental plants escaping from gardens are the main pathway for non-native plants outnumbering native plant species in the British flora, with some of them having high negative impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity and the built environment.'

Plants reported so far include non-native yellow monkey flower (*Mimulus guttatus*, pictured right invading a water course) while natives seen to be causing problems include tree mallow (*Lavatera arborea*) and variegated yellow archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*).



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JOIN IN

Records will be held in a permanent archive by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, to help track long-term changes in plant distribution. You can submit records via the Plant Alert website or app. plantalert.org



PLANT HEALTH & SEEDS INSPECTORATE

Look out for new agapanthus mite

A species of eriophyid mite, that appears to be new to science, has been detected for the first time causing leaf bleaching on agapanthus (picture above shows affected plant on the right).

In April, the Plant Health & Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) investigated two nursery-grown cultivars of *Agapanthus praecox* displaying signs of mite feeding damage. A short trace-back by PHSI found evidence of the new mite on at least nine cultivars including A. 'Bridal Bouquet', A. Ever Sapphire ('Andbin') and A. 'Royal Velvet' AGM at a further two nurseries.

Eriophyid mites are usually host-specific. None have previously been reported on agapanthus, strongly indicating the mite is a previously unknown species. A Defra spokesperson said, 'The mite is present in the UK, and appears to be widespread within the agapanthus industry, therefore we have concluded that statutory action or notification of this pest is not necessary.'

The mites are white to pale orange and live on the foliage of the plant, preferring the undersides of leaves. They are extremely small (approx 0.2mm in length), so are not visible to the naked eye. Inspection with a hand lens is needed.

Affected plants, however, display symptoms that are easier to spot, such as: a slight bleaching of the leaves; speckling of the upper leaf surfaces; and uneven and fewer flower buds. If gardeners with plants showing mite damage wish to treat their plants, a fatty acid-based or insecticidal-soap formulation is advised. Test a few leaves first for phytotoxicity.

For advice on growing agapanthus search 'Agapanthus' at rhs.org.uk/advice

A real beauty wears the crown for 2021

The coveted accolade of Rose of the Year 2021 – traditionally celebrated at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival with an impressive central display of flowering plants – goes to new Floribunda (cluster-flowered) *Rosa Belle de Jour* ('Deljaupar').

Bred in France, it produces many-petalled flowers with deep yellow centres, blending to rich orange on the outer petals. Blooms are 'sweetly fragrant with a vanilla and apricot scent'. Plants are said to have superb disease resistance.

Plants are available this autumn from rose nurseries and garden centres.



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