

Invasive plants - How can I help?

The plants you buy

More than 60% of invasive plants in the UK are garden (and garden pond) escapees. Most of these plants are still available for sale here, with many garden centres, pet shops, aquarists, DIY stores and supermarkets across the country selling damaging species. At the moment it is completely legal for them to sell these plants, even though the [Horticultural Code of Practice](#) urges that retailers avoid selling non-native plants that are known to be invasive and the Government has powers to ban the sale of invasive plants.

You can do your bit now: tell store managers that you don't want to see invasive non-native plants on sale, and don't buy them. Change is most likely to happen if customers demand it.

*Just blame the Victorians? Whilst it is true that the Victorians brought many exotic plants back to Britain, the buck doesn't stop there. The highly invasive floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* was first recorded in the wild in Britain in 1990. Your choices today, over the plants you buy for your pond, aquarium or garden, matter.*

Proportionately, more aquatic plants cause problems than terrestrial plants: many are submerged plants used to oxygenate garden ponds or aquaria. Often they are not chosen for their aesthetic appeal, merely their function. Other, non-harmful plants can easily be used as oxygenators instead. Making that decision not to buy should, therefore, be even easier. [Our three guides on plants to try in place of invasive non-natives for your garden, pond/aquarium and landscaping projects can be downloaded from the publications page.](#)

The plants you don't mean to buy

Even if you want to avoid buying invasive plants, you might be caught out by 'hitchhikers' or poor labelling.

Plants that you buy could be carrying hitchhikers - small fragments of other plants that could start to grow and become invasive. This can be a particular problem with pond plants where an invasive plant may regrow from a fragment just 5mm long. You can avoid these by washing your plants in a bucket before putting them in the pond, then emptying the bucket over the lawn or flower bed, well away from any watercourses or drains.

Plants on sale in garden centres, nurseries, aquarists, pet shops, DIY stores and supermarkets are often badly labelled with insufficient information about the growth potential of plants and their safe disposal. Sometimes invasive plants are even mis-labelled. The well known invasive plant New Zealand pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*, for example, may be labelled '*Tillea recurva*', whilst other invasive non-native plants such as parrot's-feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum* may simply be labelled as an 'Oxygenating plant'. Incorrect or incomplete Latin names and a lack of care information for the plants are common. Invasive non-native plants are sometimes labelled with a 'Buy British' slogan as they have been cultivated within the UK.

If in doubt, ask your plant retailer to identify the plant properly for you.

Our leaflet [What's in your pot?](#) is a useful mini guide about invasive aquatic plants. It can be [downloaded from the publications page.](#)

Taking care not to spread invasive plants

Ponds and gardens need to be maintained regularly regardless of the plants you use. Excess plant matter should be disposed of responsibly by composting or using a local garden waste rubbish collection (not your normal bin collection).

Make sure you don't spread invasive plants around - even transporting a 5mm fragment of New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii* is sufficient to cause an invasion of another waterbody. Fragments can be transported in the tread of shoes, so clean your footwear after you've been managing your pond. If you take part in water activities like fishing or kayaking, clean boats and all equipment before transporting them from one waterbody to another.

Don't give away excess problem plants from your pond, aquarium or garden to your friends. This will simply spread the problem to them too.

Don't bring plants, fruits, soil, into the country from abroad. A plant's benign behaviour in its country of origin is no guarantee against invasiveness in a new country.