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Ground-Breaking New Initiative to Help Australians Garden Responsibly

Australians love their ornamental gardens — but they can come at a cost to our environment when ornamental plants escape and become weeds in our natural landscapes. Around 72% of weed species were originally introduced as garden ornamentals and invasive species cost Australia around \$13.6 billion each year.

Gardening Responsibly is a ground-breaking new initiative that allows the greenlife industry, researchers, community members and government to work together to determine the likely level of invasive risk of the more than 30,000 ornamental plants in trade, and prioritise the promotion and sale of low-risk plants. This makes it easy for all Australians to enjoy beautiful, healthy gardens while reducing the impact of future landscape-scale weed invasions.

“Our goal is to make it easy to garden responsibly so we can all enjoy beautiful gardens and healthy Australian landscapes,” says Program Manager, Aimee Freimanis. “We love to imagine a world where checking that an ornamental plant has a low risk of invasion is common practice for all Australians.”

At the heart of the initiative is the Certified Gardening Responsibly eco-label — the gardening responsibly tick of approval. Only ornamental plants that have been assessed through the Initiative’s open research portal as having a low future-invasive risk will get the tick, and only member suppliers who have joined the Plant Sure Scheme can sell or provide plants with the tick.

The Initiative has been designed over five years in consultation with over 650 stakeholders and has been assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust. Macquarie University (Sydney) researchers conducted the initial research and developed the ground-breaking Ornamental Plant Decision Support Tool used to predict levels of plant invasive risk through our research portal.

“Loss and degradation of escaped ornamental garden plants is a key threatening process. It is critical to prevent future invasions. The tool, developed in partnership with Macquarie University, allows us to identify the invasion risk of plants, and gives industry and gardeners an opportunity to reduce the risk to the environment,” says Hillary Cherry, Senior Weeds Officer at the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service.

The Gardening Responsibly Initiative is currently being piloted with a small group of suppliers in north west Sydney and is expected to launch across NSW in spring 2022.

Find out more about the program at www.gardeningresponsibly.org.au

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