



## **New 'green ticks' for green thumbs to help fight Australia's weed invasion**

A new green tick pilot program has just launched providing green thumbs with a new weapon to fight the war on weeds, which costs Australia more than \$13.6 billion<sup>1</sup> every year. Escaped garden plants can cause harm to a huge number of threatened and endangered species and communities, with more than 207 invasive plants affecting 1257 threatened and endangered species across Australia.

Launched by Member for Hornsby Matt Kean, the Gardening Responsibly initiative will be rolled out across select NSW nurseries in Greater Sydney.

The voluntary scheme brings together industry, government and the community to actively help reduce invasive weeds that are threatening biodiversity and costing Australia more than \$13.6 billion each year.

With 72% of weeds in bushland starting out as ornamental garden plants<sup>2</sup>, the Gardening Responsibly initiative will trial the introduction of green-tick 'eco-labels' to make it easy to choose plants with a low risk of impacting native landscapes.

Each ornamental plant will be assigned an 'invasion risk' rating which will be assessed through a ground-breaking scientific tool developed by Macquarie University researchers.

Available on the Gardening Responsibly website, the open-source tool will allow researchers and citizen scientists to assess plants and collaboratively grow a database of certified low-risk plants.

NSW Environment Minister James Griffin said the ground-breaking collaboration is supported by funding from the NSW Environmental Trust, the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Local Land Services, with in-kind contributions from industry associations and individuals across the entire horticulture sector.

"This is a massive game-changer, bringing together industry bodies, university labs, nursery shelves, Government agencies and our own back gardens to fight the war on invasive weeds," Mr Griffin said.

"Today, hundreds of escaped garden plant species are recognised as threats to our native plants and ecosystems right across the country," Mr Griffins said.

"Sometimes, it's not just a pretty plant – it has a high risk of becoming an invasive weed. By putting the 'eco-label' green tick on plants that don't jump the fence, gardeners can quickly understand what they're buying."

The four consortium partners – Nursery and Garden Industry NSW & ACT, the Australian Institute of Horticulture, NSW Department of Primary Industries and NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service – have worked together since 2017 to co-design this voluntary certification Scheme.

"It's easy to underestimate the impact that invasive weeds have on our natural landscapes and biodiversity," Mr Griffin said.

"Australia is home to plants and animals found nowhere else in the world, and it is our responsibility to conserve and protect them," he said.

"Gardening Responsibly is a breakthrough initiative that could change the way we buy plants for our gardens and help prevent future invasive weeds from threatening our native plants, animals and ecosystems."

Each year in Australia, around 11 million gardeners buy 2.5 billion plants from among the 30,000 species or cultivars which are sold through nearly 25,000 businesses, according to Responsibly's Program Manager Aimee Freimanis.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoffmann BD, Broadhurst LM (2016) The economic cost of managing invasive species in Australia. *NeoBiota* 31: 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3897/neobiota.31.6960>

<sup>2</sup> Groves, RH., Boden, R., Lonsdale, WM. (2005). *Jumping the Garden Fence: Invasive Garden Plants in Australia and their environmental and agricultural impacts*. Ultimo, NSW (WWF-Australia).

The grant-funded pilot has already risk-assessed 660 of the 30,000 plant varieties currently traded in Australia.

“One of the initial aims of this NSW pilot was to develop and test a ‘national-ready scheme’. This phase will prove that the scheme is viable, credible, and self-sustaining. We are in the process of doing that, and we’re looking to find partners to join us in building this solution right around Australia.

“Gardening responsibly means ensuring you buy, sell and install ornamental plants that won’t jump the garden fence and cause harm to the environment. Being aware is the first step.”

Plants with the Gardening Responsibly tick can be found in participating retailers in NSW.



### **Consortium Partners**

In 2015 the NSW Environmental Trust invited stakeholders to a workshop to scope a solution to the ‘wicked weed’ problem as it is not the responsibility of any individual agency to prevent such a complex landscape scale issue.

In 2017 a Consortium was established with Nursery & Garden Industry NSW & ACT (Project Host), Australian Institute of Horticulture, NSW Department of Primary Industries and NSW Department of Planning & Environment/National Parks & Wildlife Service working together to co-design a voluntary certification Scheme.

### **About Gardening Responsibly**

Funded by the NSW Government with support from its Environmental Trust, Gardening Responsibly is a collaborative, new initiative that takes a ground-breaking approach to finding and promoting plants with a low risk of becoming invasive weeds. Its goal is to make it easy to garden responsibly so we can all enjoy beautiful gardens and healthy Australian landscapes.

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