

Invasive Plants In The Malaysian Landscape

Mustafa Kamal Mohd. Shariff¹ and Shamsul Abu Bakar²

^{1,2}Department of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Design and Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract

The increasing use of exotic plants for urban landscaping has presented a new threat to the local ecosystems when the newly introduced plant species thrive out of control—i.e., becoming invasive—in the new environment. If left unchecked, they are capable of displacing local plants; and thereby, causing a disruption to the local ecosystems. The disruptions can contribute to permanent changes this paper highlights the threat and suggests methodologies for the prevention, management and eradication of these invasive plants.

Keywords: Landscape, Invasive Plant, Local Ecosystems, Management

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, like many countries in the formerly colonised world, hundreds of plant species from as far away as South America, Africa, and even China were known to be introduced as ornamentals. Many have become so well adapted to the locality where they were planted that we assumed that they are of local origin. These naturalised plants have adorned our public spaces, roads and home gardens. Others have become a scourge clogging waterways, contaminating agricultural produce and interrupting existing ecosystems. The latter will change the existing local landscapes forever.

As development continues to affect existing landscapes and there is a need to mitigate the post-construction damage to the environment, landscaping has become important. Currently, legislative edict requires that all development to be followed by landscape mitigation work. Furthermore, the rise of urban living quite detached from Mother Nature necessitates the creation of public parks and gardens in the vicinity of housing localities.

It is this need to use plants in the landscape that has made landscape designers to seek more varieties of planting materials for their projects. Procuring exotic

species from outside the locality or even outside the country and region has become “common” practice. Using trees such the Angsana (*Pterocarpus indicus*), Flame of the Forest (*Delonix regia*), Yellow Flame (*Peltophorum pterocarpum*), and Jacaranda (*Jacaranda fillicifolia*) has been implemented since colonial days by municipalities in the country. More recent examples include Khaya (*Khaya senegalensis*), Tecoma (*Tabebuia pentaphyla*), and Andira (*Andira surinamensis*).

This paper aims to highlight the concern in using imported plants species and in particular those species that present a threat to its ecosystem and characteristics. Landscape designers and managers must be aware that these “invasive plants” can damage the local natural environment. Ignorance and apathy could unintentionally contribute to more damage to the environment that one seeking to improve.

2. Invasive Plants

Current literature on the subject defined imported plants that can damage local environment as invasive, nonnative, alien, exotic, or non-indigenous (ESA, 2003). These are introduced plant species that have evolved elsewhere but have been purposely (through horticulture, landscaping, etc.) or accidentally (through contaminated seeds, carried by animals, stuck to clothing, etc) introduced to local environments. Once in the new environment, these plants will grow wild and overtaking many local species. Their success in the new environment is often attributed to the absence of local constraining agents such as pest and diseases, adverse climate, etc. that have checked growth in their native environment.

The suppression, and later on the displacement of local plant species by these newcomers will change the composition of existing plants in that locality. The disruption of existing plant communities will have a serious impact on other living species such as reptiles, birds, and even large animals. These entities are dependent for food, shelter, and other needs to ensure their existence and

