

National Code of Good Practice

Gardens & Invasive Alien Species

Common concerns over the significant detrimental impacts of invasive alien species may bring together interest groups to draw attention to those man-mediated actions or interventions that may facilitate the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. In parallel with the drawing up of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species, a series of sector-specific codes are being drawn up to raise awareness and promote good practice to curb the risks associated with introducing and using alien species that exhibit an invasive potential. The mandate for such codes is found in Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2012-2020). The present document puts forward a series of recommendations to serve as a code in gardening activities, be it in private or public gardens. The recommendations, which adopt the principle of self-regulation, aim to provide practical and concise guidance in establishing common standards of good practice and responsible attitudes and behaviours when using alien species in gardening. The recommendations do not replace established national legislation that regulates activities that use alien species. The recommendations are intended to be complementary to the legally-binding obligations defined in national legislation to entice compliance, and to also support the implementation of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species. Wide dissemination of this code to the target stakeholders is of essence in order to create partnerships and encourage voluntary adoption in order to overcome any malpractices that may occur as a result of lack of knowledge or understanding of the risks that alien and invasive species may pose.

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Further Reading:

European Code of Conduct for Botanic Gardens on Invasive Alien Species – Heywood, 2012 [TPVS/Inf(2012)1]¹

Alien plants have been deliberately introduced in Malta throughout the years and planted in **public and private gardens** and also in the Argotti Botanical Gardens. Such gardens represent diverse collections of alien (apart from native) species in cultivation. While these gardens provide significant social benefits as green areas in villages and towns, not to mention their botanical, historical and cultural interest and value (in view of the antiquity of planted specimens), there is always the risk of escape of alien plants (and associated pests) from cultivation and subsequent naturalisation in the environment. An example is the historic escape of Cape sorrel (*Oxalis pes-caprae*, Maltese: *il-ħaxixa Ingliza*) and sea aster (*Symphotrichum squamatus* = *Aster squamatus*; Maltese: *is-settembrina s-selvaġġa*) from cultivation at Argotti and their subsequent widespread invasion of the Maltese countryside. Their range of invasion is so ubiquitous nowadays, that eradication is impossible for these species.

Private gardens also pose a risk of accidental introduction into the environment either through escape or through inappropriate disposal of garden waste. **Good gardening practices** are hence essential in order to minimise the risk of accidental introduction from gardens, also when considering that climate change may increase these risks.

The following recommendations are adapted from the “**European Code of Conduct for Botanic Gardens on Invasive Alien Species**”. The recommendations apply to botanic gardens, public gardens and private gardens in the Maltese Islands. The recommendations are intended to be followed by personnel managing botanic gardens, public gardens and parks, and, to individuals who own a garden within their private residence in order to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, both those already known to pose a threat in Malta and those new to Malta that could pose a threat in the future.

✘ DO NOT PLANT alien species in natural and semi-natural habitats, or in places where they might escape into the wild.

✔ BE SURE to plant native/indigenous species, which are compatible with the local ecosystems.

✘ DO NOT DISPOSE of debris of alien species, or any plant waste in natural and semi-natural habitats (including waterways), or in places where they might escape into the wild.

✔ BE AWARE of the issues and problems posed by invasive alien plants and take these into consideration in all decisions of what species to include in planting schemes in your garden.

✔ BE AWARE of, and comply with, EU and national environmental legislation, plant health legislation and quarantine legislation concerning invasive alien plants as well as plant pests.

✔ BE AWARE of the species listed as of Union concern and the national list of species deemed to be

¹ Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680746836>

invasive alien species as well as those classified as environmentally-incompatible and CHECK whether these are already found planted in your garden. BE AWARE of the risks of escape in which case CONTACT the competent authority for advice.

✓ REMOVE any invasive plants of Union concern and national concern from your garden, as soon as detected or confirmed; seek prior advice from the competent authority if unsure how to do this.

✓ DISPOSE responsibly plant waste, plant-containing waste from any part of the garden, as well as packaging and containers (which may harbour hitchhikers, such as spores and parasites), by complying with national regulations for the safe and effective disposal of waste and also by following the EPPO 2008 Guidelines for the management of plant health risks of biowaste of plant origin², and the former MEPA 2013 Guidelines on managing non-native plant invaders and restoring native plant communities in terrestrial setting in the Maltese Islands³, as appropriate.

✓ ENSURE that no invasive or potentially invasive plants are accidentally introduced into your garden, by: (1) avoiding to plant material about which you have doubts; (2) using only healthy plants; (3) avoiding to move soil that is known to contain noxious weeds; (4) using growing media, for which you know the source, that are free from invasive seed and propagules; and (5) avoiding contaminating shoes, clothing, and equipment by adopting good practices of hygiene.

✓ OBSERVE and REPORT any signs of invasive behaviour shown by plants in your garden collection.

In the case of botanic and public gardens, also:

✗ DO NOT offer for sale seeds or propagules of invasive or potentially invasive plants from your collection;

✓ SHARE information on your plant collection with the competent authority;

✓ ENSURE that all staff handling seeds and plants are trained in preventing the spread of alien species beyond the boundaries of the garden;

✓ UNDERTAKE an assessment of existing plant collections for actual and potential invasion risk also in the face of climate change (e.g. shifts in species distributions and in phenological features);

✓ ADOPT good labeling practices;

✓ ADOPT contingency planning as part of your garden policy;

✓ CONSIDER adopting the recommendations of the European Botanic Gardens Consortium (<http://www.botanicgardens.eu/>) and the Botanic Gardens Conservation Initiative (<http://www.bgci.org/>) and participating in their initiatives such as BGCI's Plant Search, the International Plant Sentinel Network (<http://www.plantsentinel.org/>) and the project on "Sharing information, and policy, on potentially invasive alien plants in Botanic Gardens" (<http://www.plantnetwork.org/aliens/>);

✓ ENGAGE with members of the public visiting your garden by informing them on the dangers of invasive alien plants and how to recognise them; this may be done through public lectures, articles in newspapers/magazines, information on the garden's websites and/or special displays/features; and

✓ COOPERATE with competent authorities to proactively minimise the escape of alien species from gardens by way of awareness raising events and also by becoming involved in research on IAS.

² Available at: <https://gd.eppo.int/download/standard/71/pm3-066-2-en.pdf>

³ Available at: <https://era.org.mt/en/Documents/PlantInvaders-RestorationGuidelines-MEPA-2013.pdf>

These recommendations, if followed by all relevant stakeholders combined with adherence to EU and national regulations, would help avoid bad practices from occurring and thereby prevent more and new IAS being released into the country. Continued dialogue and cooperation between Government, and public and private gardeners is of essence to minimise proactively the escape of alien plants and plant pest from gardens and to promote these recommendations as an agreed national code of best practice that is widely supported.