

National Code of Good Practice

Horticulture & 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 for the horticulture sector. 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 the horticulture sector. 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:

Code of Conduct on Horticulture and Invasive Alien Plants, – Heywood & Brunel, 2011¹

Many of the plants used in the **horticulture sector in Malta** are not native but have been introduced deliberately over the past years from other countries. Most of these introductions have not caused problems through their becoming invasive. However, a small percentage of these introductions have escaped from cultivation, have become naturalised and have subsequently invaded natural, semi-natural or man-made ecosystems. They are known as “Invasive Alien Plants” (IAP) and have significant ecological, social or economic impacts, also leading to the loss of native biodiversity.

Ornamental horticulture has been recognised as the main **deliberate pathway** of plant invasions in the Maltese Islands. **Accidental pathways** may include discarded garden waste, compost heaps, packaging materials, waste water (in the case of aquatic plants), soil growing media, and machinery and equipment. To avoid such accidental introductions and spread, strict procedures are needed to mitigate the risk. Moreover introduced or imported plants can also carry **plant pests or harmful organisms**, which may in turn be invasive. Altered climate patterns can have significant effects on the spread of invasive alien plants. Climate change is likely to put increasing pressure on the horticulture sector in terms of affecting production and in the selection of what species to stock in nurseries and garden centres for horticultural trade.

The following recommendations are adapted from the “**European Code of Conduct on Horticulture and Invasive Alien Plants**”. The recommendations are relevant to the horticultural sector (including plant and seed introducers/importers, plant nurseries, and garden centres) as well as those entities engaged in landscaping and afforestation. The recommendations are intended to encourage cooperation to adopt good practices in raising awareness on this topic amongst professionals, preventing the introduction of possible new plant invaders into Malta, and preventing the spread of invasive alien plants already present in Malta.

✘ DO NOT STOCK and SELL plants that have been identified as environmentally-incompatible, invasive or potentially invasive to the Maltese Islands and the European Community.

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

✘ DO NOT DISPOSE of debris of alien species, or any plant waste in natural and semi-natural habitats, or in places where they might escape from cultivation into the environment.

✔ BE AWARE of which plant species are on the Lists of IAS of Union concern and national concern; for species that are not listed, information on invasive characteristics may be obtained by referring to online databases on IAS. If a species is declared as invasive in the Euro-Mediterranean area or in areas with a similar climate, it is likely to become invasive in Malta (if conditions are favourable).

¹ Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168063e49f>

✓ COOPERATE with national competent authorities to prevent the spread of invasive alien plants (IAPs) that are already in cultivation and to prevent the introduction of new IAPs into Malta through the horticulture pathway.

✓ 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.

✓ PROVIDE advice on proper use of alien species in horticulture and appropriate disposal of plant parts to prevent spread outside of cultivation.

✓ ADOPT good labelling practices for all species offered for sale by specifying the scientific and common names, (incl. synonyms) and the variety or cultivar, on labels attached to other plant parts, trees and pot plants and seed packets, as appropriate; For potentially IAPs that are traded, information should be added (on the label and also in nursery catalogue) on origin of the species, including a cautionary note not to allow it to escape from gardens and not to plant it where it can spread to natural and semi-natural habitats.

✓ CONFER information about the significance of IAPs and the damage that they can cause and the risks that sowing and planting them might pose, thereby promoting an innovative and green image to your customers.

✓ PROVIDE substitutes for invasive plants that are no longer sold; these substitutes may be native species or non-invasive alien species.

✓ DISPOSE, responsibly, plant waste and unwanted stock of plants and plant-containing waste 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, as appropriate.

✓ TAKE INTO ACCOUNT the increased risks of alien plant invasions due to global climate change and adapt horticulture activities to climate change, especially rising temperatures, by developing pre-emptive and reactive adaptation strategies or options in cooperation with national competent authorities.

✓ ADOPT good production practices to prevent contamination of soil and growing media, machinery, tools, equipment, footwear, gloves, packaging and containers by IAPs thereby avoiding spread and damage to the environment and also avoiding management costs. For newly introduced and imported plants and plant parts adopt the good practice of keeping such plant material isolated from locally produced plants and from those growing in the wild. During the production of aquatic plants for ponds or for aquaria great care should be taken to ensure that these species cannot escape from growing tanks or closed ponds into the wild.

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 the horticulture industry is of essence to minimise proactively, and provide appropriate solutions

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

to, the IAS problem in the horticultural/ornamental plant trade via awareness raising, provision of advice and the promotion of these recommendations as an agreed national code of conduct and that is widely supported. Consultation with the Competent Authority is suggested when attempting to identify any potential IAP.