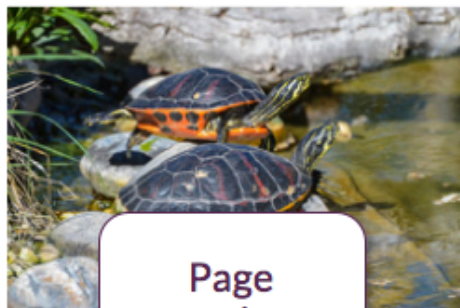


Enemies Among Us

by Bettina Petersen

There is a reason we call Florida home. It is ideally suited for us. Unfortunately, this hospitable climate is not without its drawbacks. The delicate ecosystem that this beautiful Florida climate supports is susceptible to invaders that also thrive in this climate. And if we're not careful the plants and animals that are native to Florida could disappear.

Florida is currently in the midst of an invasive species crisis that could cause irreparable damage to the entire ecosystem. What is an invasive species? An invasive species is one that is introduced into an ecosystem where it is not naturally occurring. If the conditions are right, that species can outcompete native species for resources and potentially drive it to extinction. And if a species does go extinct, the entire ecosystem it inhabited will be impacted.



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...species of plant that is kept in
...ive ecosystem may not have the
same competition for resources in the
ecosystem that it is introduced to. When
growth is supported in this way the species can
aggressively take over. And this could spell
both environmental and economic disaster.

Many may be surprised to discover that
Florida's Green Iguana population is not native
to the peninsula. Because of this, the lizard's
ravenous vegetarian appetite has had a major
impact on Florida's fruit industry. This problem
is exacerbated when people treat these wild
animals like backyard pets—creating even more
favorable conditions for them.



So, what can people do to help the Florida
ecosystem? There are many steps that
residents can take to prevent the introduction
and spread of invasive species into the
ecosystem. One step, as outlined by Salvatore
Ricci (2013), involves being more aware of what
we introduce to our local environments.