

Homestead Valley Backyard Gardening: Helping our public lands from your own property

By Kristin Desmond Ashley

Hello fellow Homesteaders! Welcome to a new article series from your Land Trust. As part of our ongoing mission to maintain our lands in an ecologically sound manner, we work to remove invasive, non-native plant species and restore natives. This is always a work in progress, and the HVLT needs as much help as it can get from the community to reduce fire hazard in this time of climate change.

We know it can be difficult for many residents to find time to directly help us on projects, but there are things you can do right now in your own gardens that will make a difference because plants don't know about property lines. What you plant today can easily spread its seeds and end up growing on your neighbor's land or open space land the next year. Instead, one backyard at a time, we can contribute to biodiversity by replacing invasive non-native plants with natives like households all over America in the [Homegrown National Park program](#).

This month, we are talking about *Echium candicans*, also known as "Pride of Madeira."

You've probably seen this plant around the Valley, and perhaps you have some in your own yard. Pride of Madeira is a native of the island of Madeira off the coast of Africa. A stately plant with beautiful tall purple flower stalks that attract bees, it is very drought tolerant and loves our mild climate. It has been much promoted in recent years by landscape designers and plant nurseries. However, Pride of Madeira is spreading rapidly into wild lands through Homestead Valley (especially on the sunnier north side of the valley) and other parts of Marin, displacing native grasses, flowers and shrubs. It likes to jump in and take over especially in disturbed areas, for example, along the slide area on Pixie trail. It has also been observed rapidly filling areas where other plants have been removed, if it's not managed. As a Pride of Madeira plant ages, it develops a hard woody structure that during the dry season becomes susceptible to fire. Marin Water has placed it on their [list of forbidden plants](#).

April is a great time to remove Pride of Madeira! Soil is still moist, and smaller plants are easily pulled by hand. Pride of Madeira has a prickly texture to its leaves which can be irritating to your skin, so gardening or work gloves are recommended. It's especially important to remove new plants as they don't usually flower during their first year, so it's a great way to interrupt the cycle. You can use a brush puller for larger specimens or ones that might have been previously cut. You can contact info@hvlt.org to borrow a puller if you don't have one. If you are not able to pull established plants yourself, and are not able to get any help, try to remove all of the flower stalks before the flowers start to dry and go to seed. They are easily removed with hand pruners, or you can just break them off the stalk. If the plant has not yet gone to seed, you can leave it to decompose in place or put it in your green compost can or on your compost pile. To help prevent further spread, if seeds are mature, you should bag the seed heads in black plastic in the sun for a month, which should kill the seeds.

Once you've removed your Pride of Madeira, what can you replace it with? California natives of course! [Ceanothus](#) species (California Lilac) have beautiful blue flower clusters and attract bees and butterflies. [Pitcher sage](#) is a fragrant, deer resistant shrub that hosts many native insects and has lovely mauve trumpet flowers. Native [lupines](#) in many shades from white to lavender to purple also grow to large shrubs with elegant flower stalks. Check out the Marin chapter of the [California Native Plant Society](#) or [Calscape's Bay Area Garden Planner](#) for many more ideas as well as educational events around gardening with native plants.

Thank you for your help!

Additional References:

[Article on horticulture and invasive plants from Marin CNPS California Invasive Plant Council](#)

Image: Echium along a fence that was previously heavily shaded by cypress. This is less than two years of growth



Image: Echium flower stalks in different stages of maturity



Image: Pulled echium plant left to decompose

