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New Plant Invades Texas Coastal Area

Temple, Texas – A new invasive plant is establishing along the Texas coast. Originally brought to the United States as an ornamental plant, Brazilian pepper tree has escaped cultivation and is invading Texas wetlands and coastal prairies. Widely introduced as an ornamental shrub, Brazilian pepper tree was popular for its red berries and bright green foliage. Other common names for this plant are Christmas berry and Florida holly.

Despite the name, Brazilian pepper tree grows as a multi-stemmed evergreen shrub in Texas. This plant has smooth gray bark, with numerous intertwining, drooping branches and foliage. The leaves are glossy, dark green, serrated, and grow in groups of five to nine leaflets.

Brazilian pepper tree reproduces by both seed and vegetative cuttings, which readily sprout. The specie can tolerate some shade and can survive up to six months of flooding. This specie is very drought resistant and grows well in Mediterranean and desert climates. Once established, Brazilian pepper tree can form dense thickets which deprive native vegetation of light and moisture. Over time, this plant will replace native species by out-competing native plants by forming dense monoculture colonies.

In addition to being invasive, Brazilian pepper tree is toxic to some people. The plant causes skin irritation similar to poison ivy and can cause respiratory difficulties in some people.

Brazilian pepper trees typically can be found in disturbed areas such as ditches, drained wetlands, fallow fields, and roadsides. If Brazilian pepper tree is growing on your property, immediate eradication is recommended. The recommended method for eradication is by cut stump herbicide treatment. Since it can be difficult to kill, it is important to treat it early to prevent the establishment of dense thickets. Specifics regarding chemical rates and time of application can be received from your local county Extension agent.

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