Several consecutive years of drought have increased awareness of the need to reduce water use in urban landscapes across California. Thanks in part to statewide and local campaigns such as the California Native Plant Society’s Ditch Your Lawn workshops and the Department of Water Resources’ Turf Replacement rebates, additional resources are now available to help with the task. These campaigns not only provide the education needed to transition thirsty lawns and gardens to drought tolerant landscapes, but also a financial incentive to do so. As this transition trend grows, suppliers have responded by making previously unfamiliar plant choices available to the home gardener. Many of these relatively new plant choices offer beauty, utility, and drought resiliency, and may also dramatically increase water conservation, lower utility bills, and enhance habitat for wildlife.

Choosing the appropriate plant for your landscape is an important consideration. A long list of species originally selected for given purposes—such as to provide erosion control, improve aesthetics, or to create a sound or visual barrier—have become problematic over time. Giant reed (Arundo donax), Scotch broom (Cystis scoparius), and French broom (Genista monspessulana), for example, are all plants widely used for their ability to control erosion; yet today, each of these species has displaced native vegetation and reduced native habitat in California. All three of
these examples of problematic species are found on the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s (CDFA) Noxious Weed List. Per CDFA, a “noxious weed means any species of plant that is, or is liable to be, troublesome, aggressive, intrusive, detrimental, or destructive to agriculture, silviculture, or important native species, and difficult to control or eradicate”.

Given its rise in popularity over the last decade, one grass in particular that poses a substantial risk of escape into California’s native habitats is Mexican feathergrass. Mexican feathergrass (Nassella tenuissima, formerly known as Stipa tenuissima) is native to parts of New Mexico and Texas in southwestern North America, as well as to Argentina and Chile in southern South America. It is not a California native; however, suited to Redding’s Mediterranean climate and adapted to sun or partial-sun conditions, well drained soils, and extreme heat, Mexican feathergrass grows readily in our harsh summer environment. This vigorous grass inhabits grassland, open woodland, roadsides, and disturbed areas. Quick to reseed, Mexican feathergrass produces seed that persists for up to four years in the soil and can be distributed across the landscape via wind, animals, and equipment. As testament to its troublesome nature, seedlings are often seen invading any crack or crevice near an original planting.

The misleading beauty of this grass, coupled with its ease of establishment and rapid growth rate, has led to its rising popularity. Embraced by home gardeners and ornamental growers, it has been planted in round-abouts, medians, parks, and urban landscapes throughout our region. Reaching a mature width and height of 12 to 24 inches, Mexican feathergrass provides an elegant border when planted en masse and, as such, its tendency to escape cultivation is often disregarded in favor of its beauty.

Though not listed on CDFA’s Noxious Weed List, Mexican feathergrass can be found on California Invasive Plant Council’s (Cal-IPC) Watchlist, an unofficial supplement to their Invasive Plant Inventory. This unofficial list contains plants that are not yet recorded on Cal-IPC’s statewide Inventory but have been reported to be spreading in California wildlands.

The California Native Plant Society, Plant Right, and the California Invasive Plant Council all offer information regarding appropriate plant species and suggest suitable alternatives to known noxious or invasive species to help gardeners make good decisions. With these tools, sound judgment, and just a little foresight, we can all determine the right place for any plant, and the right plant for any place.

The misleading beauty of this grass, coupled with its ease of establishment and rapid growth rate, has led to its rising popularity. Embraced by home gardeners and ornamental growers, it has been planted in round-abouts, medians, parks, and urban landscapes throughout our region. Reaching a mature width and height of 12 to 24 inches, Mexican feathergrass provides an elegant border when planted en masse and, as such, its tendency to escape cultivation is often disregarded in favor of its beauty.

Though not listed on CDFA’s Noxious Weed List, Mexican feathergrass can be found on California Invasive Plant Council’s (Cal-IPC) Watchlist, an unofficial supplement to their Invasive Plant Inventory. This unofficial list contains plants that are not yet recorded on Cal-IPC’s statewide Inventory but have been reported to be spreading in California wildlands.

The California Native Plant Society, Plant Right, and the California Invasive Plant Council all offer information regarding appropriate plant species and suggest suitable alternatives to known noxious or invasive species to help gardeners make good decisions. With these tools, sound judgment, and just a little foresight, we can all determine the right place for any plant, and the right plant for any place.

The misleading beauty of this grass, coupled with its ease of establishment and rapid growth rate, has led to its rising popularity. Embraced by home gardeners and ornamental growers, it has been planted in round-abouts, medians, parks, and urban landscapes throughout our region. Reaching a mature width and height of 12 to 24 inches, Mexican feathergrass provides an elegant border when planted en masse and, as such, its tendency to escape cultivation is often disregarded in favor of its beauty.

Though not listed on CDFA’s Noxious Weed List, Mexican feathergrass can be found on California Invasive Plant Council’s (Cal-IPC) Watchlist, an unofficial supplement to their Invasive Plant Inventory. This unofficial list contains plants that are not yet recorded on Cal-IPC’s statewide Inventory but have been reported to be spreading in California wildlands.

The California Native Plant Society, Plant Right, and the California Invasive Plant Council all offer information regarding appropriate plant species and suggest suitable alternatives to known noxious or invasive species to help gardeners make good decisions. With these tools, sound judgment, and just a little foresight, we can all determine the right place for any plant, and the right plant for any place.