
ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES

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Time to time, many plant species has been introduced to Sri Lanka either intentionally or accidentally. Their existence, dispersion and naturalization persisted unnoticed. However, with the present interest on biodiversity it was realized that some of these species are posing a threat to the existence of many other native species. In recent studies, about 20 of such species have been identified as invasive in nature and many concerns has been directed on them. Presently, some of these species are economically important and widely used.

For example, *Tithonia diversifolia* (wild sunflower) *Panicum maximum* (guinea grass), *Pennisetum clandestinum* (kikin grass) *Prosopis juliflora*, *Lantana camara*, *Eichhornia crassipes* (water hyacinth) and *Myroxylon balsamum* (Kattakumanchal) provide multiple uses such as cattle feed, fodder, green manure, biopesticides and phyto extractants.

Similarly *Mimosa pigra* and *Parthenium* may have economical values not yet investigated and exploited. Therefore, the most appropriate and intelligent way of handling these so called invasive species is to identify and exploit their full economic potential and to investigate as to why they have reached the invasive status. However, further investigations would be necessary in any attempt to commerciable such products.