

# Native and Exotic Species in the Urban Forest

## What is the difference between native and exotic species?

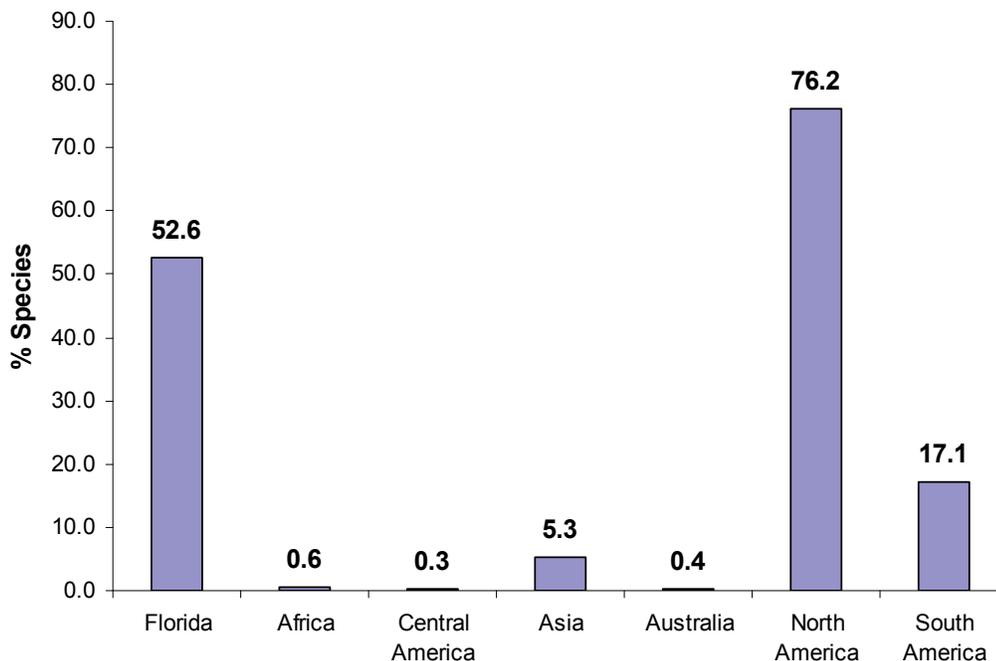
Native species are defined as those that were found in Florida prior to European colonization in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Exotic (non-native) species are outside of their native range and have been introduced to Florida by humans, either intentionally as crops, ornamentals, etc. or by accidental transport across natural boundaries via boats, trains, and/or automobiles.

## What is an invasive species?

Some of the tree species in Tampa are also classified as “invasive.” Invasive species are able to spread into and dominate an area due to a lack of natural predators and/or diseases. Invasive species tend to be non-native but can also be native. Regardless, invasive species are considered as such because they negatively impact the ecological functions of the forest by reducing species diversity. Species diversity is necessary to maintain the resilience of the urban forest, especially when considering natural disturbances and the forests ability to provide efficient ecosystem services such as nutrient cycling (preventing nutrient loading), air pollution reduction, carbon sequestration, and habitat availability.

## Does Tampa’s urban forest have non-native and invasive species?

Of the 93 tree species found in Tampa, 76% are native to North America. Of those, approximately 50% are considered to be native to Florida (Figure 1). From an ecological perspective the fact that only half of the species are native to this state is less than desirable. But perhaps of greater concern is that one of the most common tree species in Tampa, Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), is both non-native and invasive. It readily spreads into disturbed areas such as fields and ditches, along canals and in flat wood forests, creating thickets that are costly to eradicate. The dominance of this species is not confined to Tampa as it is estimated to be established on over 1 million acres throughout the state.



**Figure 4: Percentage of tree species found in the study by their respective region of origin. Species native to Florida are a subset of the species native to North America.**

