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## Weeds and habitat

What is a weed? The simplest definition is a plant out of place, but that can cover a multitude of sins. One well-known gardening magazine recently included rainbow nardoo on its eccentrically chosen list of the 10 most serious aquatic weeds in Australia, on the sole ground that it is declared noxious in Tasmania, after a single and minor infestation was recorded from a short section of coastal stream 50 kilometres south of Hobart. Yet if some fool had not deliberately introduced this plant here it would never have established, and there is little chance that it will spread to other streams in a part of Australia far south of its natural range.

Rainbow nardoo also happens to be a significant native habitat plant across much of its eastern Australian range, a fact the author of the article did not appear to know. Nor did he mention the several hundred introduced wetland plants that are spreading fast in other parts of this country, including many serious weeds, some of which were still being offered for sale by advertisers in the very same issue of that gardening magazine!

A mistake like this is just ignorance, but even botanists don't always agree on what doesn't belong on this continent, let alone what has been introduced from other parts of Australia. I have already discussed in some detail the sorry story of waterbutton in *Planting Wetlands and Dams* (2009), a plant declared introduced by a clique of botanists without any evidence, and overlooking three papers published in the 1980s showing that its pollen was present in lake cores up to 10 000 years old. The situation for several other wetland plants formerly regarded as native is less clear cut, but in the absence of any solid evidence of post-European settlement introduction it is premature to make any decisions about their status until adequate historical and genetic research has been done.