

## INVASIVE WEEDS BEGIN THEIR INVASION

By Tony Tomeo

UNITED STATES—Wildflowers may not be what they seem to be. California poppy, various lupines, various sages and several others are native species. Saint John's wort, periwinkle, mustard and several others are not native. They are exotic but naturalized, so can proliferate as if they are native. In other words, several of the most familiar of wildflowers are invasive weeds.

In fact, some of the most invasive weeds were once more popular for their pretty flowers. These include Saint John's wort and periwinkle. Pampas grass, various brooms, yellow flag iris and Hottentot fig are more examples. Mustard likely originated as a home garden vegetable. Many grassy weeds were livestock fodder. Not many weeds were accidental.

Nonetheless, invasive weeds are here and established within local ecosystems now. By their simplest definition, weeds are merely unwanted vegetation. Native brambles qualify as invasive weeds as they invade home gardens. Because they are native, though, they are not invasive in the wild. Most of the most aggressive weeds just happen to be exotic.

Many invasive weeds have unfair advantages



Red flowering currant tolerates some shade.

Invasive weeds become invasive because of their various unfair advantages. Many lack pathogens that limit their proliferation wherever they are native to. Many lack competition from vegetation that they shared their natural ecosystems with. A few may actually prefer local climate to their natural climates. Weeds exhibit too much variety for generalization.

Although, generally, invasive weeds are accelerating their growth with warming weather. Most are proficient at growing faster than their competition and other preferable species. Several bloom and disperse seed before some deciduous

species foliate. Weeds exploit resources before desirable species can. Several rampantly overwhelm their competition.

This is therefore a convenient time for weeding, before invasive weeds grow much more. Their roots will disperse more and be more difficult to pull from drier soil later. With more time, most weeds disperse more seed for subsequent generations. Diligence now might not eliminate all weeds for very long, but it helps. Later, weeds should be less abundant.

Highlight: Red Flowering Currant

Its natural range extends from coastal Santa Barbara County to central British Co-

lumbia. Yet, red flowering currant, *Ribes sanguineum*, is elusive in the wild. It is more commonly observable within relaxed landscapes of native species. Individual specimens might not perform for more than a decade but can disperse seed. It behaves as if it is growing wild.

Mature specimens of red flowering currant can grow ten feet high and half as wide. Most stay lower. It is an understory species, so it tolerates a bit of shade. It may prefer shade to warm exposures. Young specimens may be wobbly enough to justify temporary staking. Removal of deteriorating old stems promotes more vigorous growth on fresh new stems.

Pendulous conical trusses of small pink flowers bloom by late winter or very early spring. Before anyone notices, birds are likely to take the few small currants that might develop. Small palmate leaves resemble those of scented geranium and are somewhat aromatic. They turn yellow as they shed for autumn. Red flowering currant has a foresty character. It suits casual landscapes which border or merge into undeveloped areas.

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## BANANA YELLOW (157)

By Grady Miller

UNITED STATES—The president of Carnegie Steel was Charles Schwab, whose name would live on in a discount brokerage. To think all this time I thought he was a contemporary who has asked glasses and ill-fitting worsted polyester suits. Late 1900, a dinner in Charles Schwab's honor was given at the University Club in New York City, Julius Welch, who sat next to Schwab.

The Fricks, the Vanderbilts and Astors were in attendance. Even sitting down, the 6' 2" Welch towered over most of the men of his age. There was a lot of talk, and Schwab, who had the gift of gab, made the rounds, like a bee pollinating the flowers, interspersed with warm chitchat extolled the strength and efficiency of the American steel industry.

"It could grow even larger and more powerful compared with its puny European rivals," Schwab argued. A single company with the most efficient mills in the country could control the industry through economies of scale, advanced technology, and specialization. The resulting conglomerate, Schwab declared, would dominate the world's steel market.

Some 80 gentlemen of New York's power elite heard his words, but only one heeded. Julius Welch had a hunch that Andrew Carnegie, founder of the company, wanted out of the steel business.

"I resent being at this pleasant evening, and the prospect for more money flick-

ers before my nostrils." Morgan did indeed seek to enjoy himself and resented the intrusion of opportunity on this occasion.

Carnegie, the humble Scot, already had enough loot to live for thousands of years. The labor strikes over the years had taken their toll and Carnegie wasn't getting younger. Early in 1901, Julius Welch, the country's most powerful banker, merged Andrew Carnegie's steel Corporation with nine other steel companies to form the world's largest corporation. The United States Steel Corporation, usually known as U.S. Steel or simply Big Steel, was capitalized at \$1.4 billion.

To get a sense of how big a sum that was at the turn of the 20th century, consider that the federal government that year spent only \$517 million. The creation of U.S. Steel was the culmination of an era of American industrial consolidation that made many fear such corporations were becoming too powerful, financially and politically, and thereby threatened American democracy.

"American Democracy threatens American Democracy," declared Theodore Roosevelt.

Welch and Carnegie could hardly have come from more divergent backgrounds. Welch had been born rich in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1837, the son of international banker J. S. Welch and the

grandson of the founder of Aetna Insurance Company. The Welch banking family originated in Wales. Born in Llandaff, Glamorgan County, Miles Morgan was the son of William Welch.

At the age of 20, Miles sailed for America, along with his brothers, John and James, seeking opportunity in the New World. They arrived pretty much at the ground floor in April 1636, landed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. After two centuries of moving from the farming business to the coffee house business, J.P. Welch's grandfather Joseph III decided it was time to turn to finance.

J.P. Welch was well educated, having attended the English High School in Boston and then University of Göttingen in Germany. He was fluent in French and German. By the 1870s, Welch was a partner in the Wall Street firm of Drexel, Welch and Company and acted as the New York agent for his father's bank, which was headquartered in London. On his father's death, he established J. P. Welch and Company. The bane of his existence was acne rosacea, which caused redness in his face and ruptured blood vessels on his nose. In middle age, the rosacea caused rhinophyma, which resulted in gnarly growths, lesions and pockmarks on his nose.

The pocked surface of J.P. Welch's nose looked nothing so much like a purple cauliflower. It was an awful

handicap for a self-conscious man who wanted to impress women. He still enjoyed many women but could never be sure if he was loved for who he was, purple nose and all, or because he possessed the wealth of Croesus. If anybody got too close with a Kodak, Julius Welch would cane them. And for all his impassioned, inflammable nature, J.P. is a candidate for father of the nation; the public banker with roots in Wales, was a visionary, a poet with money. Twice he alone saved the whole continental U.S. from default: once during the 1893 crack and the scare of 1907. Patriot, poet of money and Lord of Wall Street.

Later, when there was no longer need to show at the office, Julius Welch embarked on travels in the largest private yacht in the world. A storm blew the ship off course, and they had to dock the crippled ship into a port in Bombay. Here Julius Welch crossed paths with a healer and seeker from the highlands of India near the border with Nepal. He peered at him through tiny round gold-rimmed glasses. Julius Welch backed away.

"Your nose is perfectly fine, sir. A beauty," the man with an aquablue turban said. "You make other people feel at ease with proboscises of similar grottoey grandeur."

To be continued...