

Q: I understand that Scarlet Wisteria is a problem plant, but I love the color. Can you recommend an alternative plant?

A: It is great that you are willing to replace this plant, as it is becoming a bigger and bigger weed problem in streams in central California. Common names for Scarlet Wisteria include rattlebox, red sesbania, coffee weed, rattle-pod, sesban, red seine bean, coffee of the coast, tame acacia, false poinciana, black acacia, purple sesbane. The botanical name is *Sesbania punicea*, and the origin is South America.

This plant has escaped from gardens where it has been grown for the attractive feathery foliage and brilliant scarlet/orange blossoms. The tall shrub loses its leaves in the winter and flowers in the spring to early summer with a profusion of bright pea-shaped blossoms. Highly poisonous seeds are produced in abundance, and are easily spread. If ingested the seeds can cause weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, depression and respiratory failure—another good reason for removing the plant. Dig up and remove all of the roots and all of the seeds pods from your garden. Do not compost unless you have a very hot compost pile.

There are a number of plants you may want to consider as alternatives: *Hibiscus syriacus* 'Lucy' is a deciduous shrub that booms in the summer with double red blossoms.

