

# The Reactor

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## It's Pacifica Vs. Pampas Grass

It's about time we deported an Argentine immigrant before it gets too firm a foothold. I'm not talking about a man but a plant. Pampas grass, that razory clump with the beautiful six-foot fronds, is growing all over Pacifica. In some places it has replaced large amounts of native vegetation. It grows where nothing else will. It may even hold soil. But we are already paying too much for its minor benefits.

Pampas grass grows especially well where the natural ground cover has been disturbed. That means a large part of our hills. Erosion damage allows these exotic plants a foothold.

Pampas grass is hard to get rid of. I once made the mistake of planting some. It grew into a tough, strongly rooted plant that I learned to dislike. It took many hours of hard labor to get rid of it. It tore up my hands with those razor-sharp leaves. It clung to the ground like a pit bull does its prey. I worked for weeks, interspersed with periods of soaking to soften the ground to finally work it all out. I never want to go through that again. And to think I planted it!

What should be done? We probably need crews to target these plants and get rid of them. It will not be easy.

I proved that to myself long since. But if we don't get rid of what we have now, Pampas grass will spread and spread opportunistically, taking advantage of erosion scars, disturbed ground, wherever it can. Unfortunately taking out Pampas grass in itself disturbs the ground, in turn creating ideal conditions for re-invasion.

There is another plant which has invaded large areas of Pacifica, this time with the help of Caltrans. Some people call it Green Death. Most people call it ice plant. Its perpetually green color and uncomplaining nature make it a bureaucrat's dream and a gardener's nightmare. You can chop up ice plant, let it heal for four or five days, toss it out on prepared soil and it will grow easily. I once read five pages of instructions from a Caltrans office that could have been summarized in that short paragraph.

Unfortunately, I have no suggestion as to which plant could be planted along the freeway to replace ice plant. Ice plant looks ugly only close up. From the freeway at 55 miles an hour, it looks little different from lawn.

Then there is eucalyptus. What should we do with eucalyptus? It, like Pampas grass and ice plant, has its limited values. For one thing, it grows where a lot of trees won't. It makes a good windbreak. But it is a dirty tree. It kills plant life around it. It does that by poisoning its neighbors. It's poor firewood because it burns too hot. As lumber it is almost valueless. Like Pampas grass it's hard to kill. Trim the top 40 feet and it shoots back up to its former height in a year or two. Like some house guests, it tends to outstay its welcome. I suspect we have some of the oldest eucalyptus in California, because more than one horticultural expert came to this area in the early days from Great Britain via Australia. They learned their craft in Europe, spent time in Australia, then settled around here. The evidence is only circumstantial but definitely suspicious.

12-16-87