

Replace Invasive Plants with Native Plants (published 5/4/2024)
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Before I completed the Master Gardener program through the University of Tennessee, I assumed that all the plants I bought were good for nature. I was so wrong! I learned that many plants sold commercially are non-native and invasive. And even worse, some are treated with neonicotinoids, a pesticide that is harmful to pollinators. I also learned about the critical need for restoring native plants. The plants sold commercially are based on what people want. So, let's tell them we want non-invasive native plants! We can also shop at places that sell native plants. There are quite a few nearby and online and more are opening as people express interest. To find a native plant nursery, check the Tennessee Native Plant Society's resources page at <https://www.tnps.org/more-resources/> .

There are several reasons why invasive species are harmful.

- They displace native plants that native pollinators rely on which results in the loss of pollinators.
- Some can alter the structure and function of an ecosystem such that native plants cannot thrive.
- They can alter soil chemistry including pH.
- They can alter water flow and form dense mats that choke out native plants.
- The following vines can even destroy trees if left unchecked: porcelainberry, wisteria, Japanese honeysuckle, English ivy, and Oriental bittersweet.
- Notice English ivy? It is on Tennessee's Invasive Species list. And even worse, it is sold in many nurseries.

Check out the Tennessee Invasive Species list to learn which plants should be avoided in your gardens. <https://www.tnipc.org/invasive-plants/>

The good news is, we can stop the invasion. Start by selecting native plants for your gardens. There are plenty of alternatives to the traditional landscape invasive plants. Here are a few examples.

Forget about Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) and choose leatherflower (*Clematis viorna*), Carolina jasmine, (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), or purple passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*).

Replace English ivy with plantain-leaved sedge (*Carex plantaginea*), marginal woodfern (*Dryopteris marginalis*), woodland aster (*Eurybia divaricatus*), coral bells (*Heuchera villosa*), creeping mint (*Meehania cordata*), Allegheny spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*), creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*), Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), or Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*).

Pull out Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergia*) and plant strawberry bush (*Euonymus americanus*), shrubby St. Johnswort (*Hypericum prolificum*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillate*), deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*), or mapleleaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*).

Remove Bradford pear (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Bradford') and Callery pear trees (*Pyrus calleryana*). They are so bad that states are banning sales of them. The Bradford pear is sterile but easily cross-pollinates with other pear trees, including the Callery pear. The result is a thug that spreads quickly and crowds out native trees. These trees have blossoms often described as smelling like fish. Their long thorns that can puncture car tires. The trees are also devoid of benefit to caterpillars which has the ripple effect of starving baby birds. South Carolina even has a Bradford Pear Bounty Program to encourage homeowners to remove Bradford pear trees and receive one of 23 native trees or large shrubs as replacements free of charge.
<https://www.clemson.edu/extension/bradford-pear/>.

Take a chainsaw to burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*) just as one of us recently did. People love it for the fall color. But a fantastic native plant is *Fothergilla* (*Fothergilla gardenii* or *Fothergilla major*). *Fothergilla* has beautiful fall foliage in shades of yellow, orange and red. It also has fragrant, white bottlebrush flowers in spring. That's a bonus over the burning bush.

Dig out nasty invasive "heavenly bamboo" (*Nandina domestica*). There's nothing heavenly about it. The berries are toxic to dogs, cats, and a number of songbirds. It's another plant admired for its color but consider replacing it with strawberry bush (*Euonymus americanus*). It has a mix of peach/rust/green leaves and gorgeous strawberry and orange-colored berries in the fall that are edible and safe for birds. Another lovely alternative is Virginia sweetspire "Little Henry" (*Itea virginica*). It has sweet-scented blossoms in the spring and nice fall color. Or how about an evergreen? Check out inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), a member of the holly family.

There are so many better choices for your landscape that support pollinators, wildlife, and us. Educate yourself about native and invasive plants to make smart choices. Remove invasive plants from your landscape and plant the "good guys".

Resources to help you learn more.

"Tennessee-Kentucky Plant Atlas," <https://tennessee-kentucky.plantatlas.usf.edu/>

"Escape of the invasives: Top six invasive plant species in the United States,"
<https://www.si.edu/stories/escape-invasives>

"Native Plant Alternatives: Kick the Invasive Exotic Gardening Habit with Great Native Plant Alternatives!"
https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/Native_Gardening/alternatives.shtml

"Introduction to Invasive Plants in Maryland,"
<https://www.extension.umd.edu/resource/introduction-invasive-plants-maryland/>

"Invasive Plant Primer for the Home Landscape – Identify, Control, Replant,"
<https://www.tnipc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Homeowners-Guide-2019.pdf>

“Plant This – Not That: Replacing Nandina,” <https://mgnv.org/mg-in-the-garden/plant-this-not-that-replacing-nandina/>

“Use Environmentally Friendly Native Plants to Replace Invasive Species,” <https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/2022/10/use-environmentally-friendly-native-plants-to-replace-invasive-species/>

“Bradford and Callery Pear,” <https://hgic.clemson.edu/bradford-callery-pear/>

How do I ask a question?

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