

Landscape Alternatives to Invasive Plants

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For many years, traditional landscaping methods have governed residential landscape designs with the need to hide our foundations using narrow beds planted with uninspiring and repetitive evergreens. Today, many homeowners are growing in their awareness of the significance of incorporating native plants within the landscape.

The many benefits of native plants are mirrored by the detriments of invasive plants that escape into the environment and displace natural forest vegetation. Invasive plants are a select group of exotic species that out-compete native plants in the wild and disrupt the natural balance of plants and wildlife. This knowledge is guiding the re-evaluation of the existing landscapes we know and experience every day.

Planting beds can be crafted with pleasing views of flowers, foliage color, bark texture, and wildlife habitats. Embrace the natural beauty of native plants that bring nature into your living environment. Also consider Backyard Habitat certification to learn more ways to support a healthy environment around your home.

This article contains recommended native plant alternatives to substitute for three invasive plant species, commonly used in our landscapes. Many of the available native plants and their cultivars are easily grown in the landscape, adding seasonal interest, providing food, shelter, and habitat without having that overly "wild" appearance.

Invasive Plant: Bradford Pear Native Alternatives: Serviceberry or Buckeye

A well-known invasive street tree, Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), is notorious for succumbing to trunk splits and structural failure after storms. To avoid the inevitable disaster and clean-up, consider planting Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* sp.), pg.7, or Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), pg.7.

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* sp.) provides a stunning three season display; delicate white flowers in the spring, blue edible fruits in June, and brilliant orange-red autumn foliage as a grand finale! This multi-stemmed small tree typically grows to 20' tall and feeds various wildlife including; Baltimore Orioles, Cedar Waxwings, Chipmunks, Black Bears and a number of butterflies and moths. Use this tree to anchor the corner of the foundation or place it along the property border so that you and a neighbor can share in the seasonal beauty and wildlife benefits.

Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) is a reliable indicator of the spring return of the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird! Tubular red flowers adorn this 20' tall tree in late April to early May. Tropical-like summer foliage followed by bold winter structure makes the Red Buckeye a unique small tree for the front yard.

Invasive Plant: Burning Bush Native Alternatives: Chokeberry or Sumac

Known for its fire-engine red fall color, Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*) is a widely planted invasive shrub with only one season of interest. Many great alternatives exist, which include Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*), pg.7 and Gro-lo Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Lo'), pg.10.

Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) has numerous clusters of white to pink flowers that cover this shrub in spring. Wonderful for supporting early pollinators, this colonizing shrub exhibits a range of heights from 3-4' to 5-10', depending on which selection you choose. Bountiful red fruits adorn the shrub in late summer and support birds such as; Bobwhites, Cedar Waxwings, Brown Thrashers, and the Eastern Meadowlark. A relative, black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) shares similar attributes and wildlife values, except the fruit is black. Autumn brings out the vivid red foliage. This adaptable plant will tolerate wet soils and salt spray; an ideal selection for the front yard with winter snow and salt exposure.

Gro-lo Fragrant Sumac (*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Lo') will surprise you with its durability in the garden. Small diminutive yellow blooms develop into red summer fruits which feed a variety of birds including Bluebirds, Thrashers, Flickers, and Bobwhites. A mosaic of reds, oranges, maroons and deep purples cover the foliage of Gro-lo Fragrant Sumac in autumn. Excellent as a groundcover or an embankment stabilizer, this 2-3' high colonizing shrub also provides a protective cover and nesting spot for birds and wildlife.

Invasive Plant: English Ivy Native Alternatives: Ragwort or Sedges

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*), a plant frequently found choking out shrubs and trees, and often smothering what would be a diverse herbaceous layer in our landscape, has escaped our gardens and wreaks havoc in our natural environment. Consider Golden Ragwort (*Packera aureus*), pg 16, and Plantain-leaf Sedge (*Carex plantaginea*), pg 21, as native evergreen and deciduous gems to use as replacements.

An evergreen groundcover with an assertive nature makes Golden Ragwort (*Packera aureus*) a desirable plant for the toughest conditions. Tolerant of a variety of soil conditions, this plant will quickly colonize an area and blend in along the woodland edge or in deep shade near the house. Golden Ragwort blooms in early spring with golden yellow daisy shaped flowers appear above 1-3' high, deep purple stems. It can easily be divided and replanted or shared with your gardening friends!

Lastly, Plantain-leaf Sedge (*Carex plantaginea*) is a nearly evergreen groundcover excellent for growing underneath trees in part shade where typically it is difficult to grow lawn. Maturing to a 6-10" height, this soft textured sedge can be present all year if left unmowed and is easily divided to increase the mass. Use Plantain-leaf Sedge to soften the edges of your landscape, underneath trees, or to add a very fine texture to the woodland edge.

Making the choice NOT to plant invasives in your landscape is the first step towards promoting a healthier environment region-wide. By choosing native varieties, you are showcasing the diverse beauty of our natural landscapes while supporting the needs of local wildlife. For more information about great native plants, visit Mt. Cuba Center's Native Plant Finder, located under the gardening resources tab at www.mtcubacenter.org.