

The Dirty Dozen – Invasive Trees & Shrubs

A problem that plagues the urban forest from coast to coast is the numerous amount of invasive plants. As responsible homeowners, we need to steer clear of these problematic plants. These plants displace native plants, and can be quite difficult to control when let run unchecked. Kudzu provides an excellent example. One only has to look around to see the potential of these plants. This is the first part of a series of articles on invasive plants. I have selected 12 of the more important species, but have left out Kudzu. I am sure everyone is familiar with its negative attributes and rampant nature.

Bradford Pear/*Pyrus calleryana* 'Bradford'

Bradford Pear is still touted by many as a superior tree. The truth is that it is very susceptible to disease and breakage in wind and ice. It is also beginning to establish in our woodlands. When driving down I24 this spring, I was amazed by how many Bradford Pears were growing in the surrounding woods. Bradford Pear is still commonly sold in area nurseries. They are cheaper than other trees, but cheap does not mean good. Stay away from this tree to prevent future disappointment, and to keep this tree from spreading in our native woodlands.

Empress Tree/*Paulownia tomentosa*

Here is another tree that can be found in abundance in Clarksville. The most notable features of Empress Tree are its large leaves and violet flowers in spring. Although the flowers are attractive, do not let this tree fool you. It grows extremely fast, but the wood is very brittle. You will be picking up plenty of branches if you have this tree in your yard. The majority of Empress

Trees that I have seen in Clarksville are in abandoned lots, fence rows, and industrial sites, although I still see it in many yards. This tree sets a tremendous amount of fruit which aids in its spread. If you have an Empress Tree on your property, do nature and everyone else a favor and remove it. A few nice flowers in the spring is not a good enough reason to grow an invasive species.

Tree of Heaven/*Ailanthus altissima*

Here is a tree with a pleasing name. I sure wish I knew who gave Tree of Heaven its name. They were way off. In my opinion, Tree of Heaven has no redeeming values to make it useful. But yet this tree prospers across a large portion of the US. Tree of Heaven grows fast, but like Empress Tree, is very brittle. I have seen this tree grow in about any imaginable place. I can recall seeing it growing in cracks of buildings and on top of roofs in Chicago. Another negative to this plant is that the sap can be a severe irritant, like poison ivy. I read an article last year where a worker had been removing Tree of Heaven all day. With the excessive contact of the sap, the man had to be hospitalized due to heart failure! As you can see, there are too many negatives to ever make this a tree useful in any situation.

White Poplar & Lombardy

Poplar/*Populus alba* & *Populus nigra*

Here are two trees that are still very popular today. You can see examples of both of them in many yards throughout Clarksville. Not only are these two Poplars invasive, they are both highly susceptible to storm damage and to fungal diseases. These two Poplars begin racing to the sky as soon as you plant them, but do not get too attached to them. Odds are they will not be around too long for you to enjoy them. If they do not fall apart all over your lawn, they

will probably succumb to disease. These Poplars have been extensively planted as windbreaks across the nation. It seems very ironic to plant a tree with brittle wood as a windbreak. Please do not confuse these two trees with our state tree, Tulip Poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). Tulip Poplar is a great tree to utilize and has many redeeming qualities. There is no reason to plant a tree that is only going to cause you tremendous trouble in the future. Go with an appropriate native tree instead.

That wraps up the first part of this discussion on invasive trees and shrubs. Next week I will select a few more species to discuss, and explain what makes them so undesirable.