

Invasive Plants Parts III

This column is the last in the three part series on invasive plants. I have selected the final four plants to discuss with you, and will talk a little about what makes each plant invasive.

Buckthorn/*Rhamnus cathartica*

Although I have not yet seen Buckthorn in this area, this is a plant that we have to be on the look out for. It wrecks havoc on native ecosystems. Buckthorn has spread throughout many states in the US. It has a very heavy seed set each year, and birds disperse the seeds everywhere. I have had many encounters with buckthorn, and none of them have been good. It takes quite a bit of hard work to eradicate Buckthorn from an area once it has established itself.

Buckthorn will develop into a large shrub or small tree. It is able to grow in the shade of larger canopy trees, and is extremely adaptable to various sites. Buckthorn will choke out all of the native undergrowth, and prevent seedlings from establishing. Buckthorn has no redeeming qualities to make it a worthwhile plant. It has a very rough appearance, and is covered in thorn-like spines.

You can still find Buckthorn being sold in some nurseries, but stay away from this plant! The consequences of this plant invading our native ecosystem can be devastating. As informed consumers and woodland stewards, it is our job to make sure that this aggressive invasive species does not establish itself in Tennessee.

Mimosa/*Albizia julibrissin*

Mimosa is a common sight across Clarksville, but the negatives of this plant far outweigh any of its merits.

Mimosa is typically planted due to its very ornamental flower display. I have to admit, it is quite striking in flower. But the true merit of a plant cannot be based on flowers alone.

Mimosa is very adaptable. It seeds heavily with large amounts of viable seeds to be spread. Mimosa is also subject to disease and insects. A wilt disease is spreading that is killing many Mimosa trees, and is also very prone to webworm.

Mimosa is another one of those plants that you can still find growing in nurseries and garden centers. Do not let anyone talk you into buying this plant, no matter how attractive it looks in flower. This tree is nothing but trouble.

Burning Bush/*Euonymus species*

Here is a group of plants that most people do not think of having invasive tendencies. I was under the same impression before I began working at The Morton Arboretum. What I discovered there in regards to many members of this species was very interesting.

A hedge garden was established in the past, and was surrounded by Burning Bush. The birds had spread the seeds to the surrounding area, and it had become quite a problem. Burning Bush was choking out a large area of woodland, and it was also establishing itself in grassy areas. After being mowed repeatedly, Burning Bush began growing more as a ground cover and spreading underneath the ground by its roots.

The control method now being implemented is to dig out the plants by hand. Chemical control has not been that effective in controlling this plant. It does not seem that our native Burning Bush, *Euonymus atropurpureus*, is a problem, but this is not the species that

is commonly sold in nurseries. I would suggest staying away from this plant. There are many other alternatives to choose from.

Oriental Bittersweet/*Celastrus orbiculatus*

Oriental Bittersweet is an invasive vine that can be very problematic. It is listed as a noxious weed by the federal government. I have seen this vine kill mature trees time and time again. Oriental Bittersweet is extremely aggressive and can take over an area very quickly. It will twine around trees and constrict the nutrient conducting vessels of the tree, which results in the tree “choking” to death. You may be finding it hard to imagine that this vine can cause so much damage but it can. I was once shown an Oriental Bittersweet vine that had a 4” diameter at its base.

Once again, there are still some nurseries providing this plant. It has a nice show of berries in the fall, which prompted it to be used as an ornamental in the past, and why some nurseries still carry it. Do not be fooled by this plant. Stay away from Oriental Bittersweet and all of the problems that it can cause.