

# Is it wrong to grow butterfly bushes? We all want to do the right thing, don't we?

Invasive species, as defined in Executive Order 13112, "an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health".<sup>1</sup> Having given the definition and impact of invasiveness far more considerations than other perhaps more important issues in my life, it was with some comfort, I discovered a concise legal definition of invasive.

Native, as defined by the USDA means, "naturally occurring at the time of Columbus".<sup>2</sup> Non-natives are referred to as introduced species, and defined as "Introduced plants arrived later, invariably with human assistance, from some other part of the world".<sup>2</sup> The establishment of a timeline is crucial, as the colonists brought in large numbers of plants native to their homelands, some intentionally, others by accident.

There has been quite a bit of discussion and debate, in our house at least on butterfly bushes, (*Buddleja davidii*)<sup>3</sup> they are classified as a "harmful invader"<sup>4</sup> in Oregon, a "class B noxious weed"<sup>5</sup> in Washington State. We maintain a half dozen different species of butterfly bushes here, in cultivation. We also propagate them, gifting them to others. Are we evildoers? I have never seen a butterfly bush in the wild, sure Russian Olives, Tree of Heaven, Mimosa, Paulownia; the list goes on, but never a butterfly bush. I personally have never heard of someone that saw a Butterfly bush in the wild.

The USDA maintains a resource on the web that we can use to help us distinguish between introduced, and native indigenous plants, and see their spread. A search for *Buddleja* (the genus for butterfly bushes) on the USDA website indicates the introduced species status of the much planted Butterfly bush.<sup>6</sup>

Butterfly bushes also appear on the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's list of "The Worst Invasives in the New York Metropolitan Area"<sup>7</sup>. Now we are done, we have identified our formerly beloved Butterfly bush as an evil foe, wreaking havoc wherever some unknowing gardener planted it. But wait there is more, if we look at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden list, we see that our best nectar producer is at the bottom of the list, as a Watch Species, defined as: "These plants are found in the wild but currently do not appear to be invasive in the New York metropolitan area. However, they are invasive in other regions and therefore are considered species to watch." Redemption, for the butterfly bush and ourselves! May the butterflies rejoice!

It certainly is, a prolific seeder, but in our gardens, where we have been growing butterfly bushes since 1999, a dozen or so grow, we get a couple of seedlings a year. After the very wet spring of 2009, we discovered a bit more than usual, maybe ten, never more than ten feet from the parent plant. Perhaps the wetter climate of the Pacific Northwest causes the butterfly bush to become invasive.

For now, we will continue to grow, propagate, and disperse butterfly bushes, as well as native species. We feel they are important supplements to the current count of least 87 species of documented New Jersey natives, and 120 or so other plants we grow here, in our wildlife gardens. We have found no other nectar source, native or alien, which produces the nectar abundance of a butterfly bush. I don't often agree with the federal government, but their definition of invasive is not emotional, but logical, and in this case I do agree. In our opinion, Butterfly bushes are not invasive in New Jersey, not by our observations, not by definition.

I could go on much longer, as I am passionate about the introduction of invasive species, and the homogenizing of our planet, but in the time it took to write this, Japanese honeysuckle has climbed up my leg and Multiflora rose began blocking the light coming in my my window, where an large flock of starlings has massed.

1 [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=1999\\_register&docid=99-3184-filed.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=1999_register&docid=99-3184-filed.pdf)

2 USDA, NRCS. 2010. The PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>, 2 April 2010). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA

3 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddleja>

4 [http://www.oregonlive.com/hg/index.ssf/2008/11/butterfly\\_bush\\_the\\_state\\_adds.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/hg/index.ssf/2008/11/butterfly_bush_the_state_adds.html)

5 [http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed\\_info/buddleja\\_davidii.html](http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed_info/buddleja_davidii.html)

6 <http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=BUDA2>

7 [http://www.bbg.org/gar2/pestalerts/invasives/worst\\_nym\\_bot.html](http://www.bbg.org/gar2/pestalerts/invasives/worst_nym_bot.html)