

Transform Your Garden from Pretty to Powerful

Scores of popular garden plants originated in other countries and are thus called “exotics.” Many have become invasive, escaping into woodlands and choking out the native plants relied on by wildlife for survival.

Growing indigenous plants helps to support pollinators and songbirds, which are also threatened by habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change. Here then are just some of the many beautiful native shrubs that make powerful replacements for merely pretty exotics, many of which are invasive.

Burning bush, or winged Euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*), is popular for its brilliant red foliage in the fall, but it is terribly invasive and of little use to wildlife. The following are replacements for burning bush:



Black Chokeberry

- **Black chokeberry** (*Aronia melanocarpa*, 3'-5' high) and **red chokeberry**, (*A. arbutifolia*, 6'-10' high) have white flowers that attract pollinators, followed by either red or black fruit loved by birds. Fall color ranges from scarlet to maroon.
- **Highbush blueberry** (*Vaccinium corymbosum*, 6'-12' high) has delicious edible fruit, high wildlife value, and crimson fall foliage.
- **Mapleleaf viburnum** (*Viburnum acerifolium*, 4'-6' high) is a gem for shady areas. It offers white flower clusters, blue-black berries, and gorgeous pink and scarlet fall foliage. It also brings in butterflies and many birds.

Butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) is grown for its appeal to butterflies and its purple, pink, or white flower spikes. However, it is considered invasive in many areas and offers no benefit as a larval host plant. Replace with:

- **Buttonbush** (*Cephalanthus occidentalis* 6'-12' high) is a deer-resistant delight for its spherical white flowers that look like Christmas tree ornaments made by aliens. They attract butterflies and many other pollinators and are followed by unique fruits eaten by birds.
- **New Jersey tea** (*Ceanothus americanus* 3'-4' high) is an excellent butterfly host plant, and its fragrant white flower clusters attract butterflies and hummingbirds.
- **Summersweet Clethra or sweet pepperbush** (*Clethra alnifolia*, 3'-8' high) has sweetly-scented white flower spikes that draw copious pollinators, followed by seeds that feed birds and small mammals.
- For pink and purple, plant **purple coneflower** (*Echinacea purpurea*), blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), and **hardy ageratum** (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) amongst these white-flowering shrubs.

The many varieties of Asian spirea are used heavily, despite sometimes dying suddenly from no apparent cause and offering little support to pollinators or birds. Replace Asian spirea with:

- **Meadowsweet** (*Spiraea alba* var. *latifolia*) and **steeplebush** (*S. tomentosa*) are native spireas growing 2'-4' high. Meadowsweet has white, sometimes pink-tinged flowers. Steeplebush is more upright with spikes of pink flowers. Both attract butterflies.
- **Shrubby St. Johnswort** (*Hypericum prolificum*, 1'-4' high) is a perky, rounded shrub that draws pollinators and birds. It displays bright yellow flowers, blue-green foliage, and handsome seed capsules in winter.
- **Bush Cinquefoil** (*Dasiphora floribunda*, formerly *Potentilla fruticosa*, 1'-3' high) has yellow flowers all summer. It attracts numerous pollinators, including two specialist bees, as well as birds.

Hybrid roses typically have high maintenance requirements, and gardeners often rely on a host of chemicals to keep them healthy. Also, they are of little use to wildlife. Replace hybrid roses with:

- **Carolina or pasture rose** (*Rosa carolina*, 1'-5' high and wide) bears fragrant, single, pink blossoms, followed by red hips that last well in winter. It attracts bees, butterflies, songbirds, and the polyphemus moth.
- **Virginia rose** (*Rosa virginiana*, 4'-6' tall) also has pink flowers followed by edible hips. It has good fall color and high ecological value.

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is another highly invasive exotic. The nursery trade has generally phased out the most aggressive varieties, but now they tend to market barberries with purple or yellow leaves—typically a turnoff or even poisonous to larval insects.

Supporting pollinators, birds, and other wildlife by growing native plants brings rich rewards. In fact, it is priceless to see these fluttering, buzzing, chirping visitors “make a beeline” to the bountiful gifts that you and your native plants offer them.