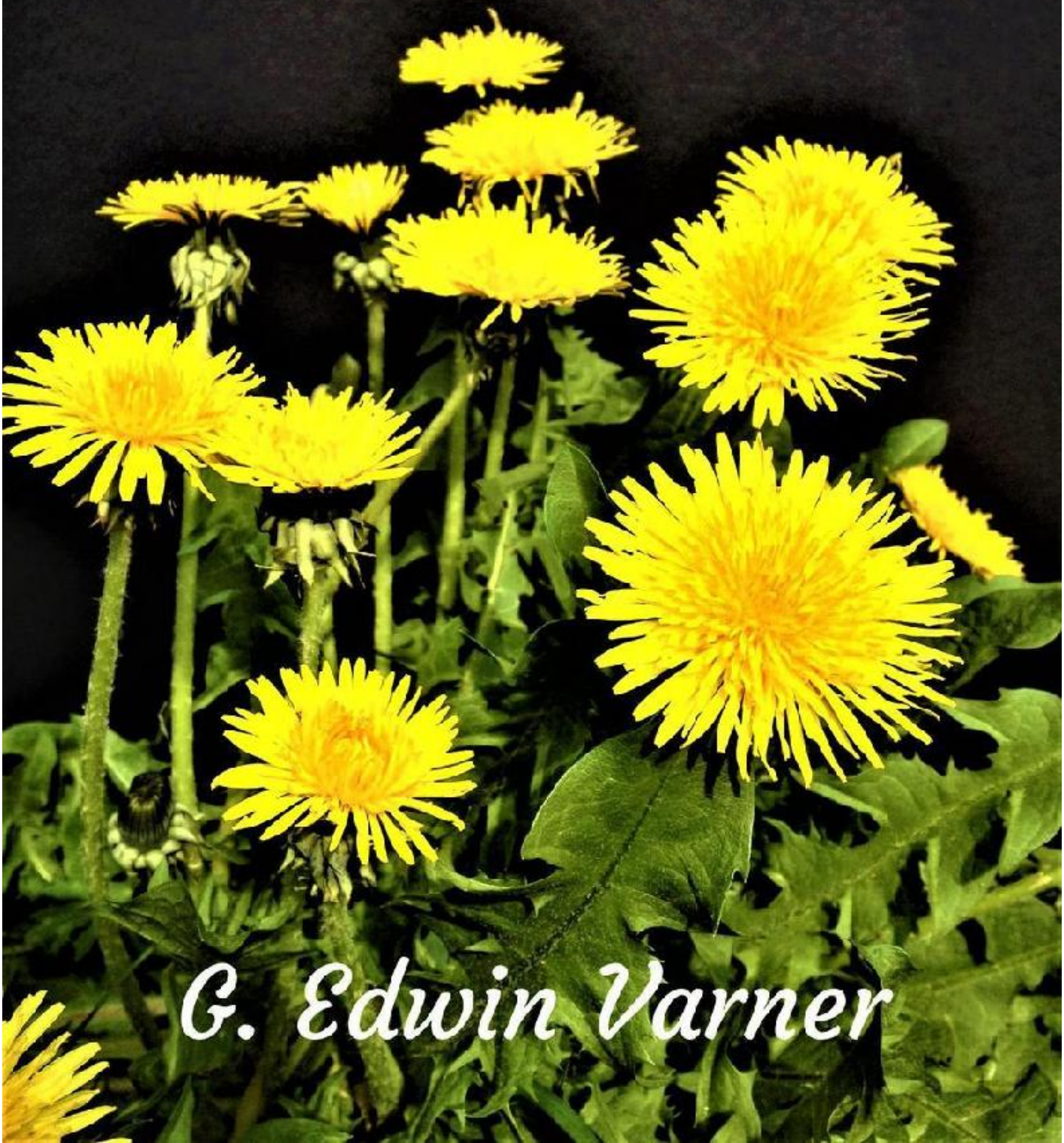
Invasive Flower Garden Plants

Something Unwanted This Way Grows



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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This entertaining ebook explores some of our flower garden plants that have become invasive in many parts of the world. Other plants include ones not grown in a garden but once considered safe to add to landscape plantings. They are now a nuisance for their tenacity in spreading quickly and aggressively to other areas.

My goal for this publication is for you to understand which plants may pose a problem, how the plants become invasive, and where invasive areas occur. Some plants can spread to all parts of the world while others, more typically, create trouble within your garden.

Please do not resort to eliminating these plants from your garden solely on this eBook's information. Instead, try to control their invasiveness tendencies by cutting off spent flowers to prevent self-seeding and limit (or contain) the spread of their roots and underground shoot (rhizome) growth.

My research into describing which plants are invasive, their history, or how they damage the environment may prove inaccurate in some details. If so, I apologize for these mistakes. Please remember that other potentially invasive plants are available in most gardens, garden centers, and nurseries. Contact your local agricultural extension service to inquire if they consider a particular plant dangerously invasive.

Portions of this publication's content are from my previous works on different floral subjects. I revised the wording and corrected some now-noticeable errors while researching the following plants.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes."

- from William Shakespeare's "*Macbeth*," Scene IV, Act I, spoken by Witch No. 2.

We are all guilty of growing and enjoying several beautiful flowering plants. The unfortunate result of doing so concerns those that display a lousy behavior of becoming invasive. They can grow uncontrollably when the environment suits them — in the wild or in your garden.

Some flowering plants, including several vines, have the potential problem of rapidly spreading outside your garden. This process is by excessive production of seeds or spreading outward by new shoots from the root system. By being vigilant, you can help prevent future problems by keeping them in control.

To be realistic, all garden plants have the potential to become invasive and grow where not intended to be planted. Fortunately, most plants behave except for some that cause significant problems for people. From my research, most, if not all, of the plants listed below (and others not described) are not intentionally spread to be invasive.

Various accidental actions and methods released them throughout the world. If grown in ideal conditions, these plants do what comes naturally: Be fruitful and multiply. And do they ever! Even those tame petunias could, theoretically, cover the earth if conditions were ideal for their needs.

The plants listed and described below are examples of garden-grown species that have encountered "the good life," with some displaying megalomanic behavior of world domination — with help from well-meaning but "slightly clueless" gardeners (like me) who enjoy their beauty. Love makes us all do silly things that might become problematic.

Scottish poet Robert Burns in his poem, *To A Mouse*, wrote: "*The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.*" And there is another saying or proverb that comes to mind, "*The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*" Growing the following plants all began with good intentions, ideas, and plans. For some, it wasn't long until the words "*we made a terrible mistake*" were uttered.

I apologize for blatantly renaming the late Ray Bradbury's scary novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes* for the subtitle of this ebook. It seems appropriate to describe these plants' collective nefarious actions to unsuspecting worldwide residential homeowners, farmers, and park managers. Various methods of eradication have proved ineffective. Some of the following plants are slowly coming toward you and possibly outside your door already. Not concerned? You should be, if not now, but later.

Ailanthus – Tree of Heaven

Ailanthus altissima

My father once called this softwood tree the “Tree of Hell.” He was not the only one who renamed it as such. Countless others had revised its heavenly name when they realized (too late) its hellish invasiveness. Why did this tree become so popular for planting?

A gnarly *Ailanthus* tree once grew near our pond. Dad always threatened to use the chainsaw on it but reprieved its execution because his sister (an avid gardener) planted it many years prior. Its pinnately compound leaves and orangish seed panicles enamored her. When she planted it, this tree was trendy for landscape planting.

As her tree grew larger (and uglier) with those smelly leaves and hordes of “fling” seeds, numerous shoots would spout further away from the base while seedlings germinated around the perimeter of the pond’s shoreline. Dad knew this “was big trouble,” so he finally cut the damn thing down and spent a summer hacking out the fresh shoots and seedlings. The problem was new seedlings sprouted each spring for several years afterward.

Native to China and throughout the Korean peninsula, sightseeing explorers brought home souvenir seeds (samaras) in the 1740s to Europe. The growing trees created a sensation; every rich dude wanted at least one tree for their estate.

This tree went viral (in today’s digital vernacular) and eventually spread to North America by 1784. Part of this popularity stems from the love affair with anything Oriental, such as Chinese art and history. Throughout the 19th century, in European and later in the eastern parts of the United States, you could find this tree growing near streets and along roads.

Let’s get to the point — the tree went everywhere where it could grow and thrive. By the mid-1800s, plant nurseries could not keep up with demand. The tree also went westward to California, Oregon, and Washington when Chinese immigrants, lured by the Gold Rush and construction of the intercontinental railroad, took along seeds and rooted shoots to remind them of “home.”

The infatuation with this tree eventually faded when people complained about its strange and disgusting odor. It took this long for people to complain? We must realize that strange and offensive odors permeated everywhere during those years due to poor hygiene and lack of sanitary sewage control in towns and cities. People soon realized this tree stank when better private and municipal sanitation measures had improved.

Other complaints were the tree only grows on moist ground and only in sunlight and not in shady areas, does not live long (up to thirty years) as compared to oak and maple trees, and is prone to storm damage by

excessive wind. One significant complaint was you could not plant any other plants underneath it. *Ailanthus* produces its own version of an herbicide (called allelopathic chemicals), which prevents other plants from growing near it and its shoots. Even after its own death by various man-made means, this toxic substance remains in the soil almost indefinitely.

Ironically, this tree became famous in literature while still being the darling of the horticultural world. In the 1943 novel "*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*" by Betty Smith, she employs this tree as an example of developing the ability to adapt to difficult circumstances, such as in an inner-city location. If this tree eventually thrives, so could the book's main characters. I can easily sum up this section on *Ailanthus* just by using Ms. Smith's book introduction:

"There's a tree that grows in Brooklyn. Some people call it the Tree of Heaven. No matter where its seed falls, it makes a tree which struggles to reach the sky. It grows in boarded-up lots and out of neglected rubbish heaps. It grows up out of cellar gratings. It is the only tree that grows out of cement. It grows lushly... survives without sun, water, and seemingly earth. It would be considered beautiful except that there are too many of it."

Well, a little more knowledge is good — especially to warn you never to plant this tree.

Akebia – Five-leaf Chocolate Vine

Akebia quinata

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This very popular and vigorous woody vine is indigenous to central China, North and South Korea, and Japan. Its name refers to the number of leaf lobes or leaflets and the color and fragrance of the flowers. Some people believe the aroma is of chocolate, while others say it is more of vanilla.

Indiana Jones-style plant explorer Robert Fortune introduced it into the United States in 1845 (and he would not be so "fortunate" to be allowed to do so today by customs officials.) There will not be an action movie about him. Still, this plant became an instant horticultural "I've got to

grow this plant," for it was not long until it began growing in gardens everywhere, including those in Europe and Australia.

In the United States, it has become naturalized, so much so that it has grown invasive in many areas (especially in eastern and southern states). Not the over-the-top invasiveness which threatens our very existence, but it can become a perpetual nuisance.

Most *Akebia* plants are monoecious, meaning they have separate male and female plants — but this species has both genders on the same flower. Well, it helps save time in plant courtship. Their flowers measure one inch wide, are reddish-brown, and bloom from mid-spring to mid-summer.

The fruits that develop during the summer are purple-violet, flattened sausage-like pods, 2 to 4 inches long, and ripen in late September to early October. The whitish pulp is edible, which animals, including birds, will eat, helping to spread the seeds to other areas from their droppings.

Ampelopsis – Porcelain Vine

Ampelopsis brevipedunculata

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You would think this would be great for any garden, for it is closely related to grapevines. Not grown for its flowers, this vine's fruit (like grapes) are colorful but inedible. Starting out as white, they change to pink, blue, purple, turquoise, and finally black as they age. Different clusters of these fruits will have different colors making a festive display. You are probably thinking, "*Wow! How can this vine be so horrible to grow in my garden?*" Well, appearances can be deceiving.

The vine will spread quickly under desirable growing conditions (easy to provide in any garden), producing vigorous twining tendrils that

wrap around everything. The fruit produces excessive amounts of seeds, which have the potential to make a multitude of new plants — everywhere.

Hardy from zones 5 to 9, this vine can cover new ground in a short amount of time. It has escaped from many cultivated gardens into the wild, choking out native plants, even trees.

Introduced worldwide from northeast Asia sometime in the 1870s, growers valued it as an ornamental for large estate gardens to help hide unsightly areas. Mission accomplished, but the estates eventually turned hideous with these overgrown vines.

Now listed as a “highly invasive plant,” nurseries and garden centers continue to sell it to the public because of its colorful fruit. They need to stop doing this, and you shouldn’t purchase them. Plenty of other colorful vines provide more enjoyment, less aggravation, and less or no invasiveness.

Buddleia – Butterfly Bush

Buddleia davidii

I reluctantly include this outstanding hardy perennial or shrub as a member of the invasive garden plant club. While researching specific garden plants that turn invasive, I repeatedly came across *Buddleia* as a trouble-maker in some regions of the USA and other countries such as New Zealand and England. Being confused and skeptical, I could not believe this woody plant could cause environmental harm. Sad to say (as well as think), it is true.

Why deny it? Maybe it involves a psychological rejection that any plant associated with colorful butterflies could do no harm. The common denominator with most invasive plants is their ability to produce an astronomical number of seeds yearly. *Buddleia* is no different, forming

tens of thousands of long-lived seeds yearly and quickly invading and growing in disturbed ground.

Buddleia davidii has become a wild plant in areas near waterway banks, open farmland, outside woodlands (but slowly encroaching inward), and disturbed residential land. For the United States, a popular retirement region for Buddleia is on the west coast, with some preferring the eastern seaboard. Sporadic populations enjoy moist locations in the country's interior.

Historically, it was one of the first wild-growing plants that bloomed — actually thrived — when the dust finally settled after the repeated World War II Blitz bombing that damaged many urban sites within London. It became known as the "bomb site plant." Even before the war, it was growing wild throughout the United Kingdom but was a welcomed sight at that time and signaled faith in a quick recovery. Sorry *Buddleia*, your time is now up.

The question is how to manage and contain further infestations in all countries affected. The easiest but impractical way is to find and destroy all wild *Buddleia* plants when found. That is fine, but that would be a Herculean task for those surviving plants that will continue reseeding.

Asking gardeners to destroy their plants is unheard of, but a more compromising solution is to ask them to dead-head the spent flower spikes before the seeds mature. In an ideal world, that would work, but most gardeners (ahh..like me) fail to do this all the time with all flowering plants.

Finally, a better solution involves breeding newer infertile varieties. Today, you can find these new types in many garden centers and they are slowly phasing out the older fertile varieties.

Buddleia infestation continues, but we must deal with the environmental problems this plant has subjected to native plants. We will have to grow more native plants that butterflies enjoy visiting.

Campsis – Trumpet Vine

Campsis radicans

This would be a prime candidate if you were to design a flowering vine that commands (or, should I rephrase that as “demands”) attention. Early 17th century English colonists arriving in Virginia, USA, had an ‘eyes-wide-open’ look when first viewing and admiring this vine in full bloom. They were so impressed that they collected samples of the vine and seeds for a return voyage cruise back to England. Hey, who doesn’t take along souvenirs? And they didn’t use a gift shop to purchase them.

So, what is so special about this vine? Let’s call it a “meat and potatoes” type of plant. It is woody, full-bodied, excels in rapid growth, and sports large, thick-petaled reddish-orange to golden yellow flowers. They are semi-tubular, with flaring ends that resemble a horn like a trumpet. The

blossoms are in clusters for an even greater impression and hang down from the expansive vines.

You would think it must be a tropical plant, but it is a semi-tropical to temperate climate vine. It is native to the eastern and southern regions of the United States but can extend its influence north even into New England and southeastern Canada. It doesn't have the same big-time blooming show as in the southern regions. Despite that, it's impressive. Blooming occurs for about two months, beginning in late spring.

As usual, there is a downside to growing this vine. It has the potential to become "secretly" invasive. The plant sports many tendrils that wrap around other shrubs and trees. Recorded specimens reaching over 30 feet tall in warmer areas of the country are not uncommon. When raised in a fertile garden, it goes hog-wild in rapid growth. It thrives outside woodlands, fence rows, neglected farm fields, and open urban areas. Vigorous new shoots arise from the roots — some several feet away from the main stem — and with all those flowers, it forms many seeds.

I can attest to this invasiveness tendency in a small but limited way. One year, I planted a potted vine near a trellis. Two years later, I decided I did not want it anymore and "ripped it out." Several new vines sprouted several feet from their original position a couple of months later. It was no fun digging and uprooting these "upstarts." A year later, smaller vines re-sprouted. So, take my cue and be careful where and if you plant this colorful and vigorous vine.

Clematis – Autumn Clematis

Clematis terniflora

At a glance, you may make a mistake in thinking this species is *Clematis paniculata*, with its thousands of small, white blossoms covering the vines from late summer through fall. Although they both look similar, this species behaves differently in growth. It is an opportunist grower — able to grow where a seed finds itself in the ground. That location can be an open field, along a rural highway embankment, on your lawn, or in your flower or vegetable garden.

In some locations in the US, botanists considered it a tenacious weed. I have encountered it growing horizontally near my home by the side of the road. The plant has been growing for years by forming a thick central stem. The horizontal vines blend with the tall grass but display

thousands of tiny white blossoms by late summer. It extends along the road bank for several yards and survives yearly mowing by the county road maintenance crew. Why I have not noticed it before is rather embarrassing since I usually know all the botanical oddities around my home.

The other perplexing question is where it came from — for I do not have it growing in my garden or my neighbors' landscape plantings. One answer is it must self-seed like mad and be carried by the wind or from a bird to new locations.

Even though our common *Clematis paniculata* has the potential to do the same proliferation of casting its seeds everywhere, it does not appear to have the endurance of becoming a weed-sprinting contender. For that, we can be thankful; otherwise, we would all be wading through extensive carpets of vines and white blossoms.

Convolvulus – Field Bindweed

Convolvulus arvensis

The first time you see its flowers, you will think, "*Oh, look! There's a pretty, new morning glory!*" Well, technically, no, but this vine is a close relative. The trouble is, this is a horrible, weedy relative. Oh boy, is it weedy!

The vines are thread-like, wrapping all over themselves and everywhere. It can create a mess of tangled and intertwined stems with arrow-shaped leaves and rather dull, pale pink to white, morning-glory-like blossoms. The common name describes it well. This vine works great if you need to bind or wrap something together. It works too well, for it can damage farm machines by quickly clogging and wrapping around moving parts.

Introduced into North America from its native areas within Africa, the state of Virginia first discovered it growing in 1739. Bindweed grew all over the eastern seaboard to Maine within a hundred years. At the same time, it was slowly spreading into the Midwestern states and territories. Surprisingly, according to historical accounts, it was discovered to be blooming in the western regions by the mid-1800s. How did it spread so quickly?

Many factors contribute to its rapid spread across the US and into Canada. One reason is the growing, harvesting, and distribution of grain in agricultural or grassy fields — just like home in Africa. The grain and accidentally included Bindweed seed capsules were transported to vast areas via railroads. So, instead of slow-motion seed dispersal by bird droppings, this plant could quickly gallop from place to place by the 'Iron Horse' choo-choo train in a relatively short time.

Ah, but there is another seed dispersal method — from gardener to gardener. Bindweed is a perennial plant and was praised as a great new morning glory. Why grow an annual when a perennial morning glory would be better? Seed companies sold seeds all over the country and the world. Botanists also blame contaminated grain for spreading this vine around the world. Oh, dear. All these actions created unfortunate consequences. To save space in this eBook, I will mention that, by now, Bindweed grows (and is despised) all over the world, except the polar regions.

Most of the time, Bindweed usually transverses as a creeping groundcover but can twine itself up taller plants. You would think we should be wading in Bindweed by now, but, surprisingly, this plant can't compete with most other plants. It loves to grow in disturbed ground, such as farm fields, roadsides, railroad byways, and even your new lawn. But, it can't grow well with other taller plants. It waits for when the growing conditions become better, forming deep taproots. During drought, most plants will suffer, but it takes advantage of this weakness and grows with abandon.

Hardy to cold zones, these taproots keep the plant alive over the winter. Physical removal of the top growth in the summer only causes it to regrow from these thickened roots. Think of it as a vine-like dandelion, for no matter what you do, except by using herbicide, you can't quickly kill it. This vine is a serious contender for world domination.

Coronilla – Crownvetch

Coronilla varia or Securigera varia

Importing non-native plants (and animals) for specific purposes is based on good intentions. But later, those ideas and ideals can become an uncontrollable curse.

For those familiar with another super-duper erosion-control plant named Kudzu (described later), imported in the 1920s and 30s, things don't always go as planned. Crownvetch (or Crown Vetch for those of you preferring a two-word name) arrived in the United States in the mid-1800s from Europe, North Africa, and Asia. In the 1950s, growers advertised it as a quick method to control erosion.

Although not as invasive as Kudzu, Crownvetch can become a problem in some areas. As a member of the Pea-Bean family, this low-growing groundcover vine can incorporate nitrogen from the air and add it to the ground. It can form its own fertilizer (just like Kudzu.) It can become a serious problem that is difficult to eradicate if not appropriately cultivated.

Its saving grace is it grows well in disturbed or less-than-ideal areas that other plants have trouble growing and in too steep or sharply inclined areas that are hazardous or impossible to mow.

Other areas for its growth include well-drained reclamation acreage and roadside plantings. Here, under proper management, it provides a remarkable job in stabilizing and improving poor soil in these areas. Lately, more landscapers are taking the hint not to plant this vine any longer. The only recommendation is not to plant seeds in fertile areas where the vines can spread rapidly.

So, can we plant them in our gardens? Discretion is the better part of valor, would be my advice to you—but—those clusters of pale to dark pink blossoms are so darn pretty. I would not plant them in the garden but in containers and remove spent blooms to prevent seed formation.

The flowers bloom all summer and into early fall in most regions. The plant is hardy, growing in zones 3 to 9. Be cautious if you grow this vine to prevent unwanted spreading to other areas.

Elaeagnus – Autumn Olive or Japanese Silverberry

Elaeagnus umbellata

This small tree is another representative of an introduced plant promising excellent solutions to controlling or reversing adverse land management problems. Like all the rest of these introduced plants, *Elaeagnus* proves to provide even more problems.

Introduced in the early 1800s to Europe and North America from its native regions of China, Japan, and the Koreas, has spread to the point it is now considered a noxious weed in many locations.

Land management agencies strictly warn never to sow or plant seedlings; you will have them forever once introduced. Ironically, this species was a land rejuvenator plant for its unusual ability for atmospheric nitrogen-fixation within its root system. Usually, a leguminous plant (of the pea-bean family) can do this, but *Elaeagnus* does an excellent job.

Land management officials hailed it as a wonderful multi-purpose tree for planting as a windbreak, wildlife habitat, erosion control, food for birds (its silvery berries contain many seeds), and a beautiful landscape tree. It is now considered a significant environmental threat. Birds are the primary dispersal agent for their massive number of seeds. It thrives in disturbed land where no native tree or shrub can develop. It mainly exploits moist (but not excessively wet) soil but tolerates occasional dry conditions. Still, plenty of locations suit its prolific growth and spread.

Near where I live are a couple of acres (or more) of a massive entanglement of this tree and shoots. Instead of providing a tree or two in a small area, this species develops an impenetrable thicket or jungle of thorn-covered seedlings and root-suckering clones. It has grown so much that nothing short of a nuclear blast can remove it. Seriously! One benefit is for the rabbit population since the foxes and coyotes have difficulty entering and navigating this woody maze.

As a gardener, I must admit this tree is beautiful with its green leaves and a reverse side of shiny silver. It shimmers in the sunlight with a light breeze and would be ideal as a landscape plant, not only for this beauty but also for its rapid growth and smaller size. The temptation of adding it to your lawn is great but avoid it. It is a toxic environmental parasite. Take the time to plant a native tree or shrub instead.

Hedera – English Ivy

Hedera helix

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Our common ivy listed as a not-to-grow vine for landscaping? Say it isn't so! This evergreen plant is native to northern Europe, Russia, and Scandinavia — which translates to being very hardy from zones 3 to 9. It can grow in full sun to shade in practically any soil type. It can cover the ground and is a familiar sight growing on house stone walls and encasing tree trunks. It can do this by using aerial rootlets that secrete a "glue-substance" that sticks tightly to a structure.

Based on these facts, it sounds terrific to grow in any garden. But let's get to the heart of the "do-not-grow" matter. It's self-clinging, fast-

growing, and capable of causing severe damage to house structures. It hides potentially dangerous problems such as deep holes and power cables and is a prime real estate for hiding unwelcome pests. And, for personal observation, it is ugly, mainly when covering vast stretches of ground and tree trunks. Some areas in the United States view this vine as an invasive weed. The state of Oregon bans its sale for it does overrun forests.

I once planted these vines around the foundation to control weeds around my newly planted shrubs. I mistakenly thought it would "behave itself," and I could manage it. At first, yes, it looked great filling in the area. But, after two years, problems developed. The vines grew tired of growing horizontally and decided a vertical climb into the shrubs and the house vinyl siding was in order. I was continually pulling down vines!

For the mat of vines on the ground, it provided the perfect, cool, dark habitat for sowbugs, beetles, and other mini-beasts. They, in turn, attracted nightmarish, ravenous packs of wolf spiders, then field mice, and, eventually, garter and black snakes. I had created a perfect storm of food-chain pests outside my door and inside my siding. NO MORE! So, during the winter, I ripped out the vines with gusto and replaced them with attractive, pea-sized gravel. Be very wary when planting this vine near your home.

Houttuynia – Chameleon Plant

Houttuynia cordata

CC0 Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.org

If you ever encounter this plant in your nearest nursery or online store, move on and forget about it. Seriously, avoid it. Once planted in your garden, you will have it forever. You will appreciate growing poison ivy more so than this plant.

For your curiosity, this plant resembles the looks and excessive growth of mint (*Mentha*) plants — but is unrelated to them. The species has dark green heart-shaped leaves, but the variety called **Chameleon** has colorful variegated ones. Its colors include yellow, orange, red, and occasional vivid pink. This attractive coloration draws gardeners to

plant it. Let's think of this plant as a type of botanical-induced shiny-object syndrome. Well, that was my stupid reason for growing it several years ago, and I regret it.

Another reason to avoid growing it is for the leaf and stem fragrance. If you think the mint plants have a pronounced aroma, this ground-covering plant exudes a horrible sickly sweet orange blossom smell. Orange blossoms smell heavenly, but this plant can turn your stomach.

The strange reason people grow this plant is for food preparation, especially in northeastern India. Here, it is a leafy vegetable served alone or cooked with other items. Gourmets describe the flavor as being "fishy." One common name for *Houttuynia* is "Fish Mint." OK. That sounds and probably tastes disgusting.

So, I have warned you. No matter how you use this plant, it stinks. Period.

Ipomoea – Morning-glories

Ipomoea purpurea and other species

Of all the garden plants listed in this ebook concerning invasiveness, Morning-glories offer the most minor trouble and worry for the world. There are no reports (as I can ascertain) of rampaging vines wrapping around every building, street pole, and tree. As for your garden, that is a different matter. Some problems with excessive seed production allow them to grow within your garden.

Although being a vine, most *Ipomoea* species will cause a “green mess” if allowed to ramble here and there in a flower garden if not trained on a trellis or fence. The chief concern for a gardener happens the following summer when hundreds of self-sown seeds germinate and begin growing. Seedling vines will pop up everywhere, so be prepared

to spend plenty of time pulling, hoeing, or hacking out any unwanted plants (several, in fact) to restore some normalcy and decorum to your garden.

If you have never grown Morning-glories, be forewarned, they are sneaky botanical critters hiding their developing seeds underneath the ever-expanding canopy of leaves throughout the summer. By fall, and especially after a killing frost, you will need to rip out the interwoven mass of spent flowers and vines.

From my experience alone, you will dislodge many previously made fertile seeds onto the ground. Forget about raking them up because of messing up the humus-enriched soil. By doing this act, you provide an excellent service to the departed “glories” by safely tucking in their leftover seeds for the winter. We think we can fool or get the upper hand over Mother Nature, but she will always make a fool out of us.

Lathyrus – Everlasting Sweet Pea

Lathyrus latifolius

This beautiful vine can create a lot of confusion for many people. The problem lies with its name. First, we assume it is an actual Sweet Pea (*Lathyrus odorata*) having very fragrant flowers. It is not. Second, people (including new gardeners) believe it is a perennial variety of the Sweet Pea instead of an annual. Who wants to grow an annual plant when a perennial type (with an attractive descriptive name as being "everlasting") is available? And so, the disappointment begins when people realize this species does not have any trace of scent and is limited in flower color to rose-pink or white. What a bummer!

This confusion may be why this vine became popular and spread to almost all areas on the earth. Native to the Mediterranean regions of

southern Europe (just like *Lathyrus odorata*), it spread to other continents — possibly via the exchange of garden flower seeds.

First reported growing in early American and Canadian gardens by the late-1700s, the plant became a weed when it escaped gardens and established itself in the countryside. Any pampered plant leaving the comfort of a garden to "go it alone" in the world has to be robust and tough, and this species is.

Today, we find it growing wild — to the point of being labeled as invasive in some areas — near roadsides or road banks, railways, farm fence rows, and other disturbed soil sites.

The plant is almost indestructible, for it survives in zones 3 to 9, quickly spreads by excessive re-seeding (from blooming all summer), and slowly creeps underground by rhizomes in most types of soil.

Well, it's here to stay, but from a garden plant standpoint, grow it and enjoy it. There are many other invasive weeds worth worrying about in your area.

Leucanthemum – Oxeye Daisy

Leucanthemum vulgare; Leucanthemum x superbum

I do not know if children continue the practice of “petal-ectomies”—the practice of plucking off daisy petals to determine if a love interest is sincere. Still, I know farmers and botanists would love to chop off all daisies if given a chance. The reason is the Oxeye Daisy is weedy in many parts of the world, especially in North America.

Native to Europe and hardy to zones 3 to 9, this tenacious plant can colonize most soils and easily out-compete native plants. Reports show it growing in North America in the 1800s. It came here as a stowaway in

imported crop seed. When the plants bloomed, they caught the attention of everyone and became a must-grow plant for their gardens.

Farmers and ranchers later found out the plants spread crop diseases and grew uncontrollably in meadows. Cattle and horses dislike eating these plants, so the land becomes unusable.

Today, botanists list the plant as one of the most invasive plants found in the United States and Southern Canada. It is against the law to sell them or have them grow in gardens in many areas. (I am not sure, but are there garden-police officers on duty?)

If prime growing real estate is unavailable, these daisies are blooming-their-heads-off near roadsides and nutrient-exhausted fields. A field or long stretches of highway lined with these daisies in the late spring are breathtaking! They are eye-candy but lack important qualities — except for providing nectar and pollen for pollinator insects.

Couldn't someone do something so we could grow them (lawfully and safely) in our gardens? Someone eventually did, but it took several years to do so.

American horticulturist and plant breeder extraordinaire Luther Burbank (1849 to 1926) had a brilliant idea. He wished to breed a new daisy that behaved itself, was hardy, floriferous, and grew best in a garden instead of in the wild. After 17 years of exhaustive breeding work involving the Ox-Eye daisy and other hardy daisy species, he created the world-famous Shasta Daisy (*Leucanthemum x superbum* or *Chrysanthemum maximum*) named after Mount Shasta in California.

Today, the large daisies sold in garden centers and grow in our gardens are variations of this stunning plant. It is not weedy, for it cannot grow well outside a garden. Best of all, the garden police will not arrest you for raising them—if they were to raid your garden. As for your marijuana plants, well, that's a different matter.

Lonicera – Japanese Honeysuckle

Lonicera japonica

The perfume of this species is intoxicatingly sweet. It is what we all associate as being 'Honeysuckle.' The enjoyment ends when discovering this species is now considered an invasive vine in many areas of the United States and has spread worldwide.

It is fast-growing and twines itself around other shrubs and trees. It has the promising potential to grow to 20 feet and higher, plus it grows excessively as a groundcover. I have seen a large area covered with this vine, so I can attest to its rapid invasiveness. There seems to be a universal law that states whatever thing or action is enjoyable, there is always an undesirable effect.

This vine is native to eastern Asian countries, including China, North and South Korea, and Japan. The flowers change from pure white when young to dark yellow when old. Both colors are present at the same time. In a perfect world, this is one of the best climbers if you need a fast-growing climber for any fence, arbor, trellis, or other sturdy support.

The leaves are evergreen in warmer growing zones but are deciduous in frigid locations. If you desperately wish to grow this vine, check your local agricultural laws before purchasing and planting it, for it can be invasive in “your neck of the woods.” Fortunately, other species and varieties are less rambunctious in growing and tamer to have in your garden. The trouble is they have little to no fragrance. It figures.

Lupin or Lupine

Lupinus polyphyllus

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Is Lupin spelled with the letter “e” or not? It depends on where you live. In North America, it does, but for the rest of the world, it does not. I like Lupin better since many people pronounce it as loo-pin.

The Latin words lupin and lupus mean wolf or wolf-like behavior. People once considered the wild Lupin plant as a botanical wolf. Wolves often stole the sheep from shepherds, so wild Lupin were horrible weeds that took over land better used for valuable crops. Today, like all members of the pea-bean family, farmers consider them helpful in

improving soil fertility. Several problems occur when they reach overwhelming proportions.

Sometimes, invasive plants come not only from other continents but directly out of our gardens. Natural stands of these plants in the western areas of North America blanket extensive acres of fields and encroach near roadsides to give drivers a pleasant vista. The trouble (well, let's call it a "pleasant" problem) begins when people — especially gardeners — duplicate this visual experience without thinking of the potential consequences.

Wild Lupins have purple, white, and blue spikes of flowers. When the rainbow colors of the Russell Lupin Strain (*Lupinus polyphyllus*) became the rage with gardeners, people began to spread seeds here and there to create a kaleidoscope of colors near roadsides and nearby fields.

One report happened in New Zealand when tour bus drivers intentionally spread these seeds along their routes to create eye-candy amazement for their tourist passengers. Officials blame landowners who needed plants to control land erosion caused by the roads. They chose Lupins for their ability to enrich the soil and for being pretty. Whatever the reason, the plan worked too well, and they have spread all over the place.

A similar event happened in northern areas of New England, where the Russell Lupin Strain has become wild (again) because of becoming invasive along roads and farm fields.

One unusual account of deliberate rampart Lupin spreading occurred in Maine. According to reports, back in the early to mid-1900s, a lady named Hilda Edwards (later renaming herself Hilda Lupina) deliberately threw Lupin seeds beside roadsides. She did this while walking about town or throwing them outside a friend's car windows on her travels through Maine and other nearby states. She seems to have been a modern-day Johnny Appleseed but obsessed with Lupins instead of apples.

No one seems to mind all this blaze of colors, except wildlife officials, for Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire have spring Lupin festivals when the flowers are in full bloom. Other states, including those leading into the Midwest, have also experienced observations of them growing near roads and fields. Officials have tried to teach people the folly of deliberately sowing the seeds in the wild. Most people ignored them or countered with vocal protests.

Botanists consider not all Lupin roadside plantings wrong. If we can use a native species as a planting, so much the better. We find an excellent example near several Texas highways when the native (and state flower) Bluebonnet (*Lupinus texensis*) blooms in the early spring.

Lythrum – Purple Loosestrife

Lythrum salicaria

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This flowering plant looks innocent enough to be planted in any flower garden, but appearances can be deceiving. This species is considered “a wolf in sheep’s clothing.” The flower spikes are gorgeous, rising above the deep green leaves, but this plant can be a significant problem when growing near wet soil areas. No matter where water and ground meet — road ditches, streams, ponds, lake banks and marshes, damp farmland, or meadows — this plant is slowly coming to an area near you. You can rest easy if you have a patio garden on a high-rise terrace or garden in a hot, dry location or in an arctic climate.

Originally from Europe, seeds may have arrived in North America in the early 1800s via commercial ships discharging their ballast water or unloading soil containing seeds. That's one theory. Another theory is someone accidentally included the seeds in shipments of rice. No matter, for it is documented by 1830, this species grew near waterways all along the New England seaboard.

Canada also experienced sightings of this colorful plant growing by waterways. Later, reports of it extending further westward, into the rivers and canals and into the Great Lakes. Today, you will also encounter this plant if muddy soil is present.

Their tenacious and excessive growth is because each plant releases millions of tiny seeds within reach of the water. Here, they can float downstream, attach to duck or goose feet, cling to boat hulls and oars, and travel "wherever" until deposited on muddy or damp ground. Later, by spring, germinate, grow, and by midsummer, produce a plethora of attractive rose-pink to purple flowers on several 12- to 20-inch-long spikes or inflorescences.

The fun begins for these flowers attract many pollinators who gladly suck up the nectar and get covered with pollen. Cross-pollination occurs, then seed formation, and finally releases all those humongous amounts of seeds back into the waterway to find new areas to conquer. Mission accomplished.

Eventually, some watery locations get clogged up with an overabundance of plants that the native aquatic vegetation dies off. This, in part, creates an ecological problem, for it upsets the lifecycle of other aquatic organisms. This happens in almost every state in the continental USA and most provinces in the southern half of Canada. There is the worry of seeds spreading into Central and South America's waterways.

So, what can we do to expedite the control of this plant? Sadly, not much can be done. Back in Europe, biological controls limit the spread of this plant. It is a weevil (an insect with mouthparts that resemble an elephant's trunk) that sucks the juices out of the plant and prevents it

from excessive flowering. We could do more harm than good if we import this bug from Europe, for it may prefer to eat this region's native plants instead. It's the classic "damn if we do and damn if we don't" situation.

You may wonder how this plant is associated with our flower gardening. Before anyone paid attention to all this "waterway suffocation" peril, seed merchants saw the pretty Purple Loosestrife flowers as attention-getters worthy of selling its seeds and for gardeners to grow. And so, they sold, and our fore-gardeners grew them.

Later, when known that these plants were trouble, growers developed sterile plants. The seeds were from genetically messed-up parent plants but produced sterile offspring. Or so they thought. Later, after gardeners grew these plants, officials were horrified to discover that these sterile plants were not so and made millions of very fertile seeds that spread into the environment.

To summarize this lengthy section, if you encounter these beautiful plants growing near an area that collects water most of the summer and fall, avoid the urge to collect seeds or take cuttings. You will do your local environment an excellent service.

Mentha – Mints

Mentha piperita and related species

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These are the ‘wild ones’ of the plant world. They enjoy the fast lane, carefree and easy. They don’t care where they roam, for they will stop for a rest and then decide to go somewhere else at a moment’s notice. They will take over an area by force and brute strength. They are tough, daring, and aggressive... but lots of fun to be around!

This description may sound like a new television comedy show, but these herbs have been around for centuries. They will grow ‘willy-nilly’ everywhere if not confined, so please be aware of this fact before you plant them near your prized perennials.

Their best growth is in those problematic growing places and areas where you do not mind where they will spread. They are ground covers par excellence. They are all perfume factories when handled or walked upon. The fragrances are soothing yet excitable; their leaves can flavor foods and drinks like teas. Keep them away from your garden's more 'civilized and cultured' members. This is the only form of segregation that is socially acceptable.

They thrive in full sunlight to shade, wet soil, dry soil, rich or poor ground, who knows—radioactively contaminated soil—it doesn't matter! They will grow where they want to grow. As expected, they are hardy to almost all growing zones on Earth and Mars.

If you wish to grow them for culinary purposes, please grow them in containers, not in the garden.

Morrenia – Strangler Vine or Latex Vine

Morrenia odorata

This is one really creepy, and it's kooky, mysterious, and spooky invasive vine. Back in the 1960s, the television show "*The Addams Family*" had the character Morticia Addams (played by actress Carolyn Jones) caring for her "pet" African Strangler plant named Cleopatra. Morticia would feed her raw hamburger (with the funny swallowing-gulp sound effect), stroke, and speak to it. Cleopatra would also wrap around the necks of unsuspecting visitors.

The *Morrenia* vine, unlike Cleopatra, is not a "fun-type" plant to grow in a garden for its hyperactive stems twine around any supporting structure. Found growing in a Florida orange grove in 1957, it has since spread, and growers now consider it an invasive plant capable of

strangling orange trees! Also, with so many stems and leaves blocking sunlight, this vine can starve an unfortunate tree or shrub.

Native to South America, *Morrenia* is related to our common milkweed plants. Like these perennials, this vine produces white sap (latex) when injured.

Hardy to zone 9 and above, grow this vine only as a curiosity-annual; raised in containers to view how vines can be “aggressive” in developing alongside other plants. Blooming occurs by late summer or early fall with small, greenish-white, scented flowers. The above photo shows flowers from my vine, but they were not fully open. Sorry!

Plant it in full sunlight, well-drained soil, and a sturdy trellis or other structure. You will not find this vine in garden centers, but some rare seed companies sell seeds.

If you live in warm climates, I advise you never to grow this vine.

Phragmites – Common Reed

Phragmites australis

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Where do I begin by describing all the various Ornamental Grass species and varieties you can purchase in garden centers and online nurseries? There is your common Fescue grass to Pampas, Fountain, Lemongrass, Reeds, Sedges, and many other blade-waving wonders. Please understand that not all grass behaves like Crab Grass in acquiring world conquest, but we must be wary of the potential some can escalate.

Phragmites australis (or the common reed) is an infamous example of a horrendous invasive species. Be afraid... be very afraid of this fifteen-tall

grass if it grows near you.

Botanists are not positive but believe *Phragmites* originally grew in Australia and spread worldwide, from the late 1700s to the early 1800s via ships traveling worldwide. Seeds may have hitchhiked through the ships' ballast water and soil and released upon arrival at a new port. Since then, although confined to wet ground, it has spread along highway ditches, near rivers, lakes, streams, marshes, and natural wetlands in practically every location on earth except the polar regions.

It proliferates abundantly and forcefully to crowd-out native vegetation and disrupts entire ecosystems. It spreads by excessive wind-blown seed disposal, prolific rhizome growth, and unsuspecting gardeners who think it would be ideal for their water garden or to plant in troublesome wet ground locations.

Each clump of this grass form extensive blades (or reeds) that has great potential for being a fire hazard. A famous event occurred on April 28, 2003, when 400 acres of this grass caught fire (suspected arson by children) in the Magee Marsh by Lake Erie near Mentor, Ohio, USA. This grass nearly smothered the marsh which is extremely important for migratory birds. The winter-dead blades fueled the fire, sending up 40-foot-tall flames and billowing plumes of black smoke seen over 20 miles away. Residents bordering the marsh were evacuated, but no damage or serious injuries were reported.

Today, the Marsh is experiencing a renewed and healthy ecological vitality through better management and control of this grass.

Although not considered an ornamental grass, it can show what happens when certain conditions are ideal for excessive growth and spread. Other grasses might do the same damage unless we monitor their growth. I recommend contacting your local garden centers and discussing which ornamental grass is hardy and less invasive for your area.

Phyllostachys - Bamboo

Phyllostachys species

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Speak of the devil, here is a popular tall-growing grass with several species with similar “looks” and growth habits. Instead of listing each species individually, I clumped them together based on their common name. “Clump” is the operative word for bamboo and is considered one of the most invasive plants you can grow.

Look at your common lawn grass. From one seed, an ever-expanding clump of blades will develop. Multiply the dimensions of this grass several times, and you get bamboo. New underground shoots will indefinitely expand unless you provide a sturdy underground barrier.

To be blunt, avoid growing bamboo if you value your mental and physical health. The best bamboo to see is those growing in China, on TV nature documentaries, providing food for those adorable pandas. Let me be frank — this grass is ugly, so spend your time growing beautiful non-invasive plants instead. For me, I cannot understand its appeal. The woody stems are unusual and sometimes functional for holding up tall-growing but floppy perennials or as makeshift fishing poles. Still, they lack beauty within a garden or patio setting.

There are several various species of bamboo that look alike but grow differently. In a general sense, botanists classify them as clumping or running types. Those species classified as "clumpers" don't spread far. If planted in a garden, they slowly expand outward but will out-compete attractive plants in obtaining light, water, and soil fertility. They are best planted (if you insist on having them) in large containers.

Other species are called "runners" for obvious reasons. Their underground shoots (called rhizomes) will expand outward at a phenomenal rate establishing colonies far and wide from their original plantings. These are the most "feared" for being invasive.

In his 1914 poem, "*Mending Wall*," Robert Frost advised, "*good fences make good neighbors.*" Bamboo was once (and, sadly, still is) considered a superb living screen to provide privacy from the prying eyes of nosy neighbors. Mission accomplished after a few growing seasons for these runner-types overgrow. Later, new shoots grow "everywhere" in areas you wish them not to grow — including on the neighbor's property. You may not see your neighbor but will definitely (or should it be "deafeningly"?) hear their cursing and verbal legal threats.

If you need privacy, erect a wooden or vinyl fence instead. Better yet, encourage your neighbor to build a barrier the size of the Great Wall of China. Well, that will not happen, but it's worth a try.

Polygonum – Silverlace Vine

Polygonum aubertii

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This excessively flowering vine is also known as Fleece Vine, Silver Fleece Vine, Knotweed, Russian Vine, and, my favorite, Mile-a-Minute Vine. That should indicate how invasive it is.

Native to Asia and hardy to zone 4 to 9, this vine is adaptable to many soil conditions and is practically a no-to-low maintenance plant. Hey, don't we wish all plants were this way? Well, don't wish to grow this plant.

Although popular to grow, never plant it near a house, for it can, within time, pull down shutters, rain gutters, and damage roofs. Once

established, this Olympic-caliber twiner can extend upward over 10 feet — in one year! You can do the math when it is allowed to continue growing for several years. Yes, you can trim it back when it is young, but you would need the use of a tall stepladder. Hopefully, you have good health insurance in case of... well, let's not dwell on that possible outcome.

Anyway, over the summer, this vine produces millions of tiny, white, sweetly scented blossoms. By late autumn comes constant showers of seeds. By spring, you will find forests of seedlings in your lawn and gardens. Have an enjoyable time weeding all of them out.

Hopefully, sometime soon, a cultivar or variety can be found or genetically created to grow shorter (let me rephrase that as "tremendously shorter") and have sterile flowers. That way, it would be a delightful vine. For now, forget about planting it and grow the Autumn Clematis (*Clematis paniculate*) instead.

Pueraria – Kudzu Vine

Pueraria montana

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After the American Civil War, the defeated Confederacy once boldly declared, "*the South shall rise again.*" Well, the rest of the country is still waiting, but if you have the Kudzu Vine (*Pueraria montana*) creeping up and around you, that prediction has come true.

At the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1876, this vine made its debut in the United States from Japan and China and later to the Southern states at the New Orleans Exposition in 1883. At both venues, the government heralded it as a unique new vine. By the 1930s, agricultural workers planted thousands of vines to help decrease the

threat of Dust Bowl soil erosion. By 1974, the Department of Agriculture officially classified Kudzu as an invasive, noxious weed and earned the infamous nickname "*The vine that ate the South.*"

At the Expositions, growers advertised it as a great, fragrant vine to grow on porch trellises to help shade houses from the hot southern sun. It worked... boy, did it work! I'm not kidding! Homeowners realized something was horribly wrong when the vines covered their entire home.

Kudzu belongs to the pea-bean family. A significant reason for its rampant growth is that it is a legume – its roots can obtain nitrogen from the air. It processes its own fertilizer, even in poor nutrient soils, and forms large storage roots that provide energy for the plant during the winter even if freezing temperatures kill the top growth.

Within time, Kudzu smothers all plants, human structures, and tall trees. So why does it spread so fast? The primary culprit for its dispersal is by seed. Birds and commercial seed companies helped spread the seeds to new areas—including a few places in Europe. Selling seeds continued for many years, even after realizing it was an invasive vine. It took until 2009 to ban internet sales in the USA.

Today, the news rarely, if ever, mentions Kudzu, but it continues a northward and westward progression in the United States. There are reports of it growing in southern Canada (populations reported increasing along the north shore of Lake Erie) and even into Europe, where Switzerland, Italy, and a slew of other locations report it is growing. It may (actually, will) increase its travels because of global warming. Even severe cold areas do not limit its ongoing spread.

Will it continue its quest for world domination, or will we control it? Sadly, all bets are on the domination prognostication. Like the dandelion, how can we stop its prolific growth and spread?

Pyrus – Callery or Bradford Pear

Pyrus calleryana

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Let's not blame gardeners for all the problems of introducing invasive plants willy-nilly throughout the world. Sometimes government officials and agencies quickly classify a plant as outstanding for everyone to grow but fail to realize its invasive potential. The case of the over-planting of the Callery Pear tree is a prime example of a "*Houston, we have a problem*" sort of oversight. It is now considered the "Jekyll and Hyde Pear Tree."

Native to Asia, a French missionary, Joseph Callery, sent seeds and shoot cuttings back to Europe in the mid-1800s. He loved the conical shape of

the mature 30 to 40-foot tree, especially when covered with thousands of white blossoms in the spring.

Well, eventually, everyone else agreed with him... except for a few irritating and inferior attributes. When young, the growing tree produces plenty of extremely sharp large thorns that would envy any rose bush. Those nasty wooden spikes can be instruments of fingertip and hand destruction. They damn-well hurt if you are not pre-warned of their attachment to a young branch.

Fortunately, the year arrives when the branches no longer produce them and instead set forth a blooming galaxy of white blossoms. The one caveat is they collectively smell of rotting fish, which attracts pollinating flies. Oh well, we can hold our noses and be happy the flies are with these trees and not buzzing among us.

When you think of a pear tree, you expect large brownish fruit by late summer, but this tree lacks them in favor of small, dinky, brown oval fruit. Well, that's a disappointment. You get no pear tarts or pies from this tree.

So, what does this tree produce that earns it a place in everyone's garden or landscape? By fall, the leaves turn from shiny, dark green to a magnificent blood-red color. The tree has the potential to outshine the Autumn leaves of a maple tree. Then again, you may not see that stunning color if you live in cold locations. The leaves drop off the tree if exposed to a mid-fall freeze. In warmer zones, yes, you can view the beautiful foliage.

In the United States, work began with genetic manipulation to incorporate beneficial Callery pear genes into regular large-fruited pear trees to produce a reliable disease-resistant pear strain. That did not work out according to plan but did form a new variety called the Bradford Pear that, instead of being a fruit tree, transformed into what was called an "ideal" ornamental residential and city landscape tree.

Beginning in the mid-1960s and until 2020, this variety became popular for extensive planting courtesy of the United States

Department of Agriculture. The state and county offices offered this and other popular trees for free to promote Arbor Day.

As the years passed, this variety developed an increase in noticeable problems. Initially, the Bradfords did not have thorny branches. Later, for some unknown reason, the spines or thorns reappeared. Also, as these trees grew, they developed an abundance of weak side branches that are prone to excessive damage by wind and ice storms.

Their small fruit was supposed to be seedless but soon developed fertile seeds and spread via bird droppings. Later, new trees were growing in places where they were not intentionally planted. Today, they are everywhere, easily identified in the spring by their abundant white blossoms.

The USDA now lists this tree as highly invasive and requests nurseries not to sell it and (optionally) for homeowners to cut down their trees no matter how tall. The problem is that this tree now grows everywhere — like all other invasive plants — especially in old farm fields, along roads and railways, and outside woodlands. Good luck in cutting down all these “ideal” trees USDA.

Reynoutria – Japanese Knotweed

Reynoutria japonica; Fallopia japonica; Polygonum cuspidatum

Move over dandelion, hit-the-road Kudzu. A more serious contender for world domination is slowly spreading. Maybe you have not heard of it or seen it in your area, but it is “out there” creeping toward you each year.

Native to the broad region of China, Japan, and North and South Korea is this extremely hardy softwood perennial/shrub that, when fully grown, towers over ten feet tall and almost as wide. Erect panicles or elongated stems with small white blossoms cover the plant beginning in early summer. Honeybee keepers value these flowers as an excellent

nectar source for their bees. The Asian community also enjoyed the young shoots or early spring growth as a spring vegetable which some people compare to rhubarb stems.

You would think these benefits would be ideal for planting in gardens or fields, but you are mistaken. One plant can spread outwards with underground shoots (rhizomes) and growth nodes on roots that can rapidly establish new colonies. When it finds a great place to grow, this plant settles down roots to the point of permanency. And let's not forget all the vast number of seeds that spread nearby.

For all you naysayers, here are a few facts that *Wikipedia* has compiled about how dangerous this plant really is:

1. This species is now found in North America and most of Europe. We currently find it in 42 of the 50 states, considered the most invasive of all exotic plants in the eastern parts of the US. In Canada, they found plants in all provinces except Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Don't feel relaxed, for someone will soon find it there someday.

2. The United Kingdom has declared it a botanical epidemic with no known permanent eradication method. Other European countries are in the same predicament.

3. Herbicides have been used to kill affected areas, but underground shoots still regrow, with an untold number of seeds contaminating the soil — which live dormant for several years.

4. This plant thrives in many soil types but prefers moist ground — usually in out-of-the-way places like roadway ditches or flood plain farm fields. That sounds "not bad," as with not being in our gardens or lawns, but these areas are also ideal for rapid expansion.

5. One documented case of how tenacious and rapid the growth rate of these plants occurred (and witnessed) in Vancouver when a single plant spread its root system underneath a four-lane highway, and its shoots emerged on the other side.

6. The World Conservation Union now considers this plant one of the worst invasive.

7. Nevertheless, with all these horror stories, plants and seeds are available for cultivation of those young shoots and as a quick source of bee food provided by beekeepers.

There are many more facts provided by the *Wikipedia* website.

Are there any of these plants near where you live? I know of a vast clump growing along a road near several small businesses. Nothing else grows in that area.

Rosa – Multiflora Rose

Rosa multiflora

This rose ranks as one of the most invasive climbing (actually, rambling) plants, other than Kudzu, found here in the United States. Like the Kudzu Vine (described earlier), this rose was initially introduced from Japan and Korea as a soil erosion control plant and a living fence (to replace barbed wire) to separate farm fields. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the US Soil Conservation Service championed using these measures.

The US Wildlife Service also encouraged planting this rose as wildlife cover and a food resource. Oh goody! Here is another example of government agencies promoting the spread of non-native plants for

some reason or other. Gee, what could happen with this rose? Please re-read the above Pyrus “Bradford Pear Tree” for a clue.

For an additional uncontrollable spread, the rose industry encouraged using this rose as rootstock to bud or graft on hybrid tea roses. The roots of this rose are hardy and vigorous growers, and a hybrid rose leaf bud attached to a Multiflora root would quickly grow into an established, saleable rose. My goodness, everybody was using this rose for every purpose under the sun, which explains the multiplication of multi-purpose multi-problems of its invasiveness.

They all forgot or overlooked two significant aspects of this rose. First, the canes are very long and flexible. As they grow long, they eventually arch over and then bend down. New plants develop when the cane tips come in contact with the ground. Think of this process as leap-frogging. But that is the slow method of dispersal to new areas.

The second and most quick dispersal is its excessive production of seeds from a tremendous number of small, white blossoms in late spring. One Multiflora Rose plant can form millions—oh, let’s be truthful—billions of seeds over its lifetime. They are within the fruit (rosehips), eaten mainly by birds, and dispersed to new locations from their droppings.

After all these years, and all these rose hips, and all these droppings, many seeds have spread over countless acres of farm and parkland. Impenetrable thickets of this rose formed, destroying native plants and making some land useless or difficult to manage. Farmers controlled them (to a small degree) in the pasture lands, but it takes time and money, along with mechanical and physical labor, to do it. There are abundant, towering “bushes” thriving and multiplying all over the place.

As I mentioned earlier, the rose industry takes some credit for the dispersal of this species. The Multiflora rootstock formed shoots, which quickly outgrew the hybrid rose. What eventually grew was a new, rambling Multiflora Rose to take over a garden.

Today, this rose is growing in parts of Canada and Europe (along with a few other countries) — most likely caused by unscrupulous garden seed vendors (most likely by Internet sales) masquerading these seeds to grow into towering garden roses. They are telling the truth, but not the type of climbing rose you would wish to grow and enjoy.

Taraxacum – Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

Yes, I must include this plant, for chances are it was, is, or will be growing in your lawn and garden. Most gardeners, even those living near Mount Denali in Alaska, can't escape it.

Most botanists theorize these plants originated in Europe but are not sure of their exact location before humans began spreading them willy-nilly, here and there. No matter where it considers its "homeland," dandelions may be the most successful plant in colonizing almost the entire planet. It now occupies all continents except Antarctica — give a few more years of climate change, and we'll see those yellow heads popping up in newly exposed patches of soil. That's a lame joke, but who knows?

These worldwide travelers have tiny flowers collected together into a composite flower head. This is no surprise since they are part of the extensive ensemble of plants in the Daisy Family. An elegant, silky white material called pappus attaches to each seed. Released from the globular seed-head by the wind or a big puff of air expelled by a child's (or us child-like adults) lungs, the seeds can travel a few yards away or to a yard in another city. They look and act like a parachute.

A new plant develops once the ground becomes disturbed and exposed to light. This process is how these plants are dispersed to all corners of the earth. Wherever the seeds land, they remain viable for a long time in the soil. Even if chopped or partially pulled from the ground, its thick root will regrow another top batch of leaves and flower heads. Without using the "nuclear option of herbicides," a plant can live for several years. That's frightening, in an unsettling way!

Although not proven, there is a theory that some seeds (or potted plants) arrived in North America with the Mayflower colonists, Vikings, European explorers, and settlers at some point in time. Everybody brought the plants with them either intentionally or as seed stowaways within the homeland soil. Other weed seeds also arrived this way since customs agents were not around then.

We must acknowledge an essential consideration that this plant played a vital role in being grown as a nutritious food item and medicinal resource throughout most of human history. The leaves made vitamin-rich salads, the yellow flower-heads transformed into deserts and wine, while the roasted roots became a coffee bean substitute.

The Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans all valued this plant for some form of cure it supposedly offered. You name the medical problem, and the dandelion will immediately heal you. Sometimes, the treatment may be a little strong and develop additional problems. For example, an old English folk name referred to the dandelion as "piss-a-bed" (I kid you not), for the roots produce a strong diuretic effect on the body.

Who could find fault with this remarkable plant? Modern homeowners who own extensive green lawns, that's who. From a historical perspective, people did not consider dandelions as weeds until they grew on a thick, grassy lawn. I am not sure if this is a similar worldwide complaint, but Americans react with disdain seeing many yellow flowers popping up all over their large green lawns and flower beds in the spring.

No matter how many broadleaf herbicide applications or how short the lawnmower blades slice through the grass, this plant, and its abundant progeny, keep reappearing. Over the years of mowing my lawn, I (and others) have noticed "possible" localized dandelion natural selection evolution occurring. The flower stalks (inflorescences) once grew tall, especially when they transformed into their fluffy seeds. They were easy to mow down then. Today, the flowers bloom below the lawnmower blade level, and even the seed heads extend shorter than usual.

Mother Nature is determined to make her favorite flowering plant the ultimate survivor no matter what hazards it may encounter. Time to wave the white flag and create a salad accompanied by a glass (or two) of dandelion wine. Remember not to consume before bedtime or you'll discover an embarrassing result by morning.

Viola – Wild Violets

various Viola species

I am hesitant to include these small perennial plants as invasive botanical pests. Some gardeners (and especially non-gardeners) have a love-hate relationship with them. They love to see them bloom but call them weeds and try to eradicate them when discovering they are growing where they are not to grow. Leaving them alone is something I believe in.

I once mowed my elderly neighbor's lawn during the spring and discovered several large drifts of wild purple violets blooming in the grass. I hated to perform violet homicide, so I raised the cutting deck an inch or two higher. The lawn may have looked like a bad haircut, but I explained to my neighbor to enjoy the colorful sight of all those violets

for a few weeks. She hadn't noticed them but was thrilled to view their beauty. Being an artist, she later incorporated them into a painting.

There are over 500 species and varieties of violets worldwide. Many are perennial (hardy from zones 3 to 7) and prefer cool, moist, sunlit dappled woodland-like growing conditions. They can't tolerate full sunlight and will suffer if the soil becomes dry. They bloom only in the spring, self-seed, and then slowly settle into semi-dormancy during the summer. The plants become forgotten about for the rest of the year.

Native violets flaunt a diversity of colors, but the common woodland species has shades of blue or purple, yellow, and white. They can also spread outward to new territories — other garden areas and lawns — by self-seeding a-plenty.

Don't be too concerned about these charmingly wild-and-crazy ground-covering perennials spreading here and there in your garden. I can think of many other plants being weedy and unwelcome. I say, embrace the wild violet for our shady gardens, and I hope you agree.

Wisteria – Chinese Wisteria

Wisteria sinensis

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Chinese and Japanese Wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*) were first documented growing in the US in the early to mid-1800s as wonderful fast-growing, fragrant flower-bearing vines to provide cooling shade to sun-drenched porches and other outdoor structures such as gazebos and trellises. Yes, they do — and add other surprising attributes, such as potential uncontrollable growth.

This hyperactive growing vine is a classic example of experiencing outstanding beauty but later developing beastly problems. Why is it that any plant with a familiar name, including China, Japan, or Korea,

always has the potential to become problematic or hazardous? Let's leave nationalism and political debates outside the garden and concentrate on what occurs inside.

People always stare at *Wisteria* when they first see it. I am no exception. I first admired this vine several years ago when visiting my aunt's best friend. She had a large one growing by her old Victorian-style house. The vine turned into a tree and grew as tall as the house, blooming with fragrant blossoms. It wrapped itself around overhangs and rain gutters plus sprawled well over the roof. Her "treehouse" sure looked beautiful with dangling flower clusters, but to grow this tall was a recipe for future disaster.

Botanists always mention Chinese Wisteria as a trouble-maker. Any *Wisteria* species can damage house siding, rain gutters, shingles, and roofs—no matter what material covers the house. Landscapers suggest planting any Wisteria as far away from the house and other structures. Case in point: Near my home, a beautiful *Wisteria* grows on and up a support pole that buttresses an electric line pole. The vines transverse along several feet of the electrical lines. I warned the homeowner of what was happening and what would happen when the vine's weight brought down the lines. I was told to mind my own damn business. Fine. Lose power and get charged for the repairs from the electric company.

Landscapers are warning new gardeners these vines grow incredibly tall. It will take time for they need to establish an extensive root system, but when the conditions are adequate for "liftoff," the tendril-enhanced shoots will climb up, up, and away. Those floral clusters are breathtakingly beautiful, but future repair invoices are not.

If the top growth does not scare you, the plethora of underground side shoots (like those described in the above *Campsis* or Trumpet Vine section) will travel to new areas and develop roots. This is a precaution in case the central stem is fatally injured. Occasionally, fresh sprouts will emerge and grow even if the main plant is healthy. An additional problem occurs when your neighbors complain about this unwanted

growth and threatens to have you appear on the *Judge Judy* TV show. Good luck in explaining your defense.

Conclusion

The purpose of this publication was for you to realize some popular garden plants have the potential to be invasive. Botanists list many more garden flowers and escaped house plants as invasive in many parts of the world. Raising “aggressive” plants in your garden could cause them to over-grow, smother your established plants, and spread to nearby areas, such as your neighborhood.

In most cases, you may not have to worry, for your regularly grown flowers will not extend beyond the boundaries of your garden. But the potential will always be present unless you dead-head or cut off spent or old flowers to prevent excessive seed formation and contain those plants with roving underground shoots.

Please research all flowering plants you intend to include in your landscaping plans. As stated in the Preface section, one wise measure is to contact your local agricultural extension office and inquire about invasive plants you need to avoid growing near your home.

With all the turmoil and conflict in the world, invasive plants are not a top priority involving solutions. Local, state, regional and national governments are stressed by providing solutions to many social, economic, health, and other environmental problems.

As gardeners, we need to be more aware of what we plant and where we do so. Understanding many invasive plants’ needs and ideal growing locations can help prevent their future spread.

A straightforward way to find a solution to a complex problem is to first learn about it, plan an action, and act as quickly as possible.

Thank You for Reading This Ebook

I hope this ebook has helped you (as it has for me) to know and understand which plants may pose an invasive problem worldwide but more typically within our gardens.

Please visit my author website of https://gedwinvarner.com concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, “I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs.” Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is “read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!”

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.