



# **BIRD-FRIENDLY NATIVE ALTERNATIVES TO INVASIVE PLANTS**

*A Resource for Nurseries & Land Managers*



# IMPACTS OF INVASIVE PLANTS<sup>1</sup>

**Annually, invasive species cause over \$100M in economic damages in Pennsylvania (PA).**

The global ornamental nursery trade is the primary pathway for introducing invasive plants. Over 140 species of plants are considered invasive in PA. Many of those invasive plants, such as burning bush, barberry, and privet, have been designated as noxious weeds, and are therefore banned from sale.

Impacts of invasive plants include:

- Loss of biodiversity and forest health.
- Agricultural impacts through invaded fields and damaged fruit trees.
- Lost timber product.
- Restricted recreational access to community parks, trails, and lakes.
- Safety concerns on roadways due to proliferation of invasive shrubs.
- Invasion of wetlands, waterways, and stream plantings, which impacts flood control, water filtration, and habitat quality of these areas.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from PA Department of Agriculture: [prdagriculture.pwpca.pa.gov/Plants\\_Land\\_Water/PlantIndustry/GISC/Pages/Invasive-Species-in-Pennsylvania.aspx#](http://prdagriculture.pwpca.pa.gov/Plants_Land_Water/PlantIndustry/GISC/Pages/Invasive-Species-in-Pennsylvania.aspx#)

## WHAT IS AN INVASIVE PLANT?

Invasive plants have the following qualities:

- Non-native to the region
- Cause environmental or economic harm to the introduced environment
- Rapid growth and reproduction, with the ability to outcompete native plants
- Readily spread from areas where planted to nearby forests, waterways, and other natural areas
- Can grow in a wide range of conditions, especially disturbed areas

## WHY CHOOSE NATIVE PLANTS?



Gardening with native plants makes environmental and economic sense - plus, they're beautiful! Native plants are those that were here prior to European settlement. They are adapted to local conditions and co-evolved with native birds and pollinators over thousands of years. A majority of popular ornamental plants originated in other continents and therefore provide little habitat value for local wildlife.

Benefits of gardening with native plants include:

- Native plants are low-maintenance. They don't need fertilizer, require less water than ornamental plants once established, and come back year after year.
- They provide food for birds in the form of seeds, berries, nectar, and insects.
- From steep slopes to clay soils to the spot in your yard that never drains, there is a native plant that adapted to those conditions and therefore can flourish.
- Pollinators and other native insects are the foundation of our ecosystem - and they need native plants thrive. Gardening with native plants supports biodiversity.

# NATIVE, BIRD-FRIENDLY SPECIES: GROWING IN POPULARITY

Interest and demand for native species has been increasing over the past decade, in part due to growing interest from eco-conscious consumers. According to Production and Marketing Practices and Trade Flows in the United States Green Industry, over 35% of plants sold in Pennsylvania were native in 2018. In addition to home gardeners, municipalities are increasingly focused on using native plants in order to support habitat, which in turn supports the local economy and recreation opportunities. As the popularity of native plants continues to grow, there is an opportunity for the nursery industry to respond to consumer demand to capitalize on this movement.

Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (ASWP) has witnessed the growth in demand for native plants first hand -- native plant sales have increased over 300% since 2018 at our native plant nursery, located just outside of Pittsburgh. Over 1,000 households have enrolled in our Certified Backyard Habitat (CBH) program. Each year, the CBH program sells out. The demand for bird- and pollinator-friendly native plants and habitat solutions is strong and ever-growing.



## AUDUBON IS HERE TO HELP

ASWP has over 30 years of experience with native plants and 3,300 members who have committed to supporting healthy habitat across southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond. ASWP is able to provide technical support and guidance to nurseries, municipalities, nonprofits, community groups, and gardeners who are interested in native plants.

Examples of how ASWP can assist with native plants include:

- Nurseries: wholesale sourcing, plant selection, workshops, custom signage, and promotion of native plant selection to ASWP constituency.
- Municipalities, nonprofits, and community groups: native plant selection, sourcing, planning for public spaces, advising on habitat restoration and/or demonstration projects, and environmental education programs.

We can all make a difference for the environment by reducing invasive species and incorporating native species into our gardens, businesses, or public spaces. Contact ASWP at [info@aswp.org](mailto:info@aswp.org) or (412) 963-6100 for assistance with native plants.

**Read on for bird-friendly native alternatives to common invasive plants.**



## NON-NATIVE INVASIVES

### JAPANESE HONEYSUCKLE

*Lonicera japonica*



- Highest invasive threat level in PA
- Will choke out other landscaping without aggressive maintenance

### EXOTIC WISTERIAS

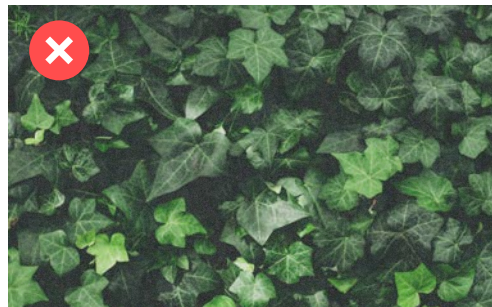
*Wisteria sinensis*, *W. floribunda*



- Can disfigure & kill ornamental trees & shrubs
- Potential to damage buildings & structures

### ENGLISH IVY

*Hedera helix*



- Weakens & kills landscape trees, which can be hazardous
- Exacerbates cracks in foundations & hardscaping

## BIRD-FRIENDLY NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

### TRUMPET HONEYSUCKLE

*Lonicera sempervirens*



- Early bloomer
- Fast-growing
- Hummingbird favorite
- Fruit attracts birds; host plant for pollinators

### VIRGIN'S BOWER

*Clematis virginiana*



- Blooms July-Sept
- Fast-growing
- Abundant flowers
- Attracts Hummingbirds & butterflies

### AMERICAN WISTERIA

*Wisteria frutescens*



- Clusters of fragrant, purple flowers
- Attracts butterflies
- Suitable for arbors & fast-growing

### TRUMPET VINE

*Campsis radicans*



- Blooms July-Sept
- Fast-growing
- Abundant flowers
- Attracts Hummingbirds & butterflies

### CREeping PHLOX

*Phlox stolonifera*



- Deer-resistant
- Showy flowers in May-Jun.
- Attracts Hummingbirds & butterflies
- Tolerates clay soil

### EASTERN TEABERRY

*Gaultheria procumbens*



- Grows in heavy shade
- Red fruit attracts birds
- Evergreen foliage
- Tolerates clay soil
- White flowers in summer



**NON-NATIVE  
INVASIVES**

**PERIWINKLE**

*Vinca minor*



- Smothers other plants, reducing garden interest & biodiversity
- Damages tree bark
- Little to no wildlife value

**WINTERCREEPER**

*Euonymus fortunei*



- Kills other plants, from tree seedlings to flowers, ferns, & grasses
- Climbs trees & fences, causing damage

**MONEYWORT**

*Lysimachia nummularia*

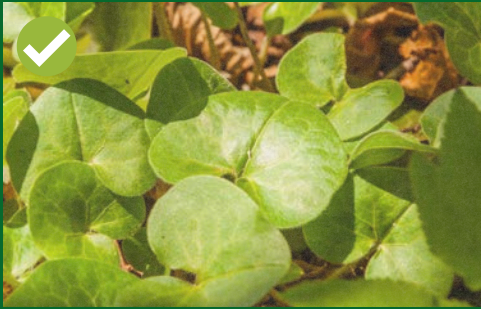


- Forms dense mat, outcompeting other plants
- Aggressively re-sprouts, making removal very difficult

**BIRD-FRIENDLY  
NATIVE ALTERNATIVES**

**WILD GINGER**

*Asarum canadense*



- Gorgeous velvety foliage
- Deer- and rabbit-resistant
- Vegetation emerges in early spring and lasts until heavy frost

**FOAM FLOWER**

*Clematis virginiana*



- Showy white flowers attract butterflies & other pollinators
- Great for garden borders
- Spring wildflower

**WOODLAND STONECROP**

*Sedum ternatum*



- Low-maintenance
- Deer-resistant
- Showy white flowers attract pollinator
- Drought-tolerant

**CORALBELLS**

*Heuchera americana*



- Great foliage plant
- Does well in containers or in the ground
- Deer- and rabbit-resistant

**BARREN STRAWBERRY**

*Waldsteinia fragarioides*



- Four seasons of garden interest
- Bright yellow flowers
- Tolerates dry - moist soil
- Forms dense groundcover

**MARSH MARIGOLD**

*Caltha palustris*



- Grows in heavy shade
- Red fruit attracts birds
- Evergreen foliage
- Tolerates clay soil
- White flowers in summer

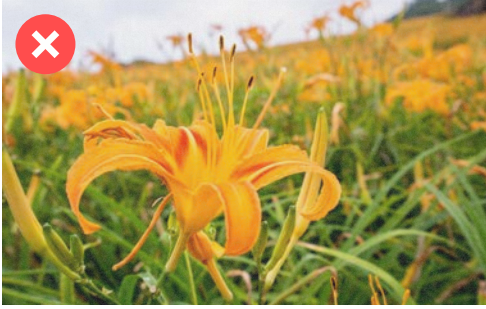




## NON-NATIVE INVASIVES

### COMMON DAYLILY

*Hermerocallis fulva*



- Forms dense patches that outcompete other garden plants
- Re-sprout from root fragments

### EXOTIC BAMBOO

*Bambusa & Phyllostschys spp.*



- People regret planting it because its so aggressive
- Quickly crowds out other species & requires constant effort to control

### COMMON REED

*Phragmites australis*



- Fire hazard - increases risk and intensity of fires
- Rapidly spreads, forming monoculture
- Very difficult to remove



## BIRD-FRIENDLY NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

GRASSES & HERBACEOUS

### BUTTERFLY MILKWEED

*Asclepias tuberosa*



- Showy orange flowers
- Monarch butterfly larval host plant
- Attracts Hummingbirds & butterflies

### BLAZING STAR

*Liatris spicata*



- Unique purple flowers
- Seeds Attract birds in winter
- Pollinator & Hummingbird favorite

### BIG BLUESTEM

*Andropogon gerardii*



- Good to plant in masses for privacy screening
- Seeds attract birds
- Red-bronze fall color
- Unique blue-green blades

### INDIANGRASS

*Sorghastrum nutans*



- Orange-purple fall color
- Seeds attract birds
- Deer-resistant
- Establishes quickly
- Tolerates clay soil

### BOTTLEBRUSH GRASS

*Elymus hystrix*



- Showy native ornamental grass; adds unique texture to garden
- Seeds attract birds
- Thrives in dry-moist soils

### SWAMP MILKWEED

*Asclepias incarnata*



- Larval host plant for many butterfly species, including Monarch
- Deer- & rabbit-resistant
- Attracts pollinators



**NON-NATIVE  
INVASIVES**

**JAPANESE BARBERRY**

*Berberis thunbergii*



- Acts as a “nursery” for ticks
- Noxious weed
- Banned for sale in PA as of 10/2023

**PRIVET**

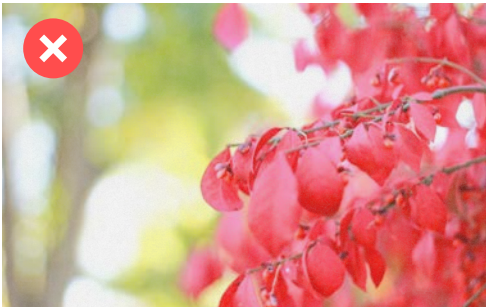
*Ligustrum species*



- Noxious weed
- Banned for sale in PA; grace period thru 1/2025
- Spreads rapidly by suckers

**BURNING BUSH**

*Euonymus alata*

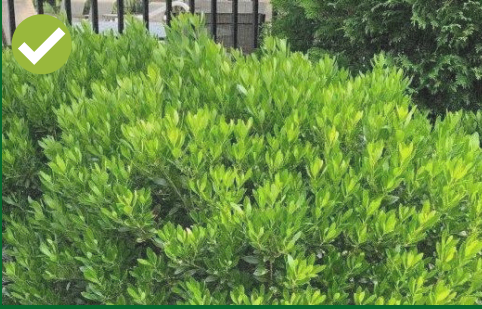


- Noxious weed
- Banned for sale in PA; grace period thru 1/2025
- Spreads prolifically through seeds

**BIRD-FRIENDLY  
NATIVE ALTERNATIVES**

**INKBERRY HOLLY**

*Ilex glabra*



- Compact, upright evergreen shrub with 4-season interest
- Red berries add winter interest & attract birds

**NEW JERSEY TEA**

*Ceanothus americanus*



- Compact native shrub
- Early spring white blooms
- Attracts Hummingbirds & pollinators
- Great for slopes

**BAYBERRY**

*Myrica pensylvanica*



- Good for natural privacy screening or in garden
- Fruit adds winter interest & attracts birds
- Semi-evergreen

**SPICEBUSH**

*Lindera benzoin*



- Early spring yellow blooms
- Yellow fall foliage
- Bright red fruit attracts birds

**RED CHOKEBERRY**

*Aronia arbutifolia*



- Brilliant red fall foliage
- Berries attract birds
- White spring flowers attract pollinators
- Unique bark

**NINEBARK**

*Physocarpus opulifolius*



- Attracts butterflies & other pollinators
- Long-lasting fruit loved by birds
- Exfoliating bark



**NON-NATIVE  
INVASIVES**

**JAPANESE SPIREA**

*Spiraea japonica*



- Highest invasive threat level
- Forms monocultures
- Seeds last in soil for many years

**DOUBLEFILE VIBURNUM**

*Viburnum plicatum*



- High maintenance needs
- Labor-intensive and costly to remove
- Spreads rapidly by seed and suckers

**AUTUMN OLIVE**

*Elaeagnus umbellata*



- Allelopathic traits impact other garden plants
- Spreads rapidly via suckers & ~200,000 seeds per plant per year

**BIRD-FRIENDLY  
NATIVE ALTERNATIVES**

**STEEPLEBUSH**

*Spiraea tomentosa*



- Clusters of pink flowers attract butterflies
- Tolerates clay soil
- Exfoliating bark
- Deer-resistant

**NANNYBERRY**

*Viburnum lentago*



- Showy white flowers
- Fruit attracts birds
- Attracts pollinators
- Larval host plant for over 100 butterflies & moths

**SWEET PEPPERBUSH**

*Clethra alnifolia*



- Fragrant summer blooms
- Blooms in heavy shade
- Flowers attract butterflies & other pollinators
- Fruit attracts birds

**VIRGINIA SWEETSPIRE**

*Itea virginica*



- Long tassels of fragrant, showy white flowers attract pollinators
- Tolerates clay soil
- Low-maintenance

**BLUE FALSE INDIGO**

*Baptisia australis*



- Shrub-like perennial with stunning blue/purple flowers
- Strong specimen plant
- Attracts pollinators

**BLACKHAW VIBURNUM**

*Viburnum prunifolium*



- Blue-black berries follow showy white flowers
- Red-purple fall foliage
- Songbirds love fruit
- Dry-moist soils



## NON-NATIVE INVASIVES

### BRADFORD PEAR

*Pyrus calleryana* 'Bradford'



- Fast-growing with weak trunk creates property damage hazard
- Scent of flowers is unpopular

### NORWAY MAPLE

*Acer platanoides*



- Dense canopy with shallow roots makes it difficult for anything to grow underneath
- Readily self-sows

### MIMOSA

*Albizia julibrissin*



- Short-lived (10-20 years)
- Prolifically reproduces
- Seeds are toxic to dogs
- Outcompetes other garden plants

## BIRD-FRIENDLY NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

### FLOWERING DOGWOOD

*Cornus florida*



- Iconic showy white flowers in spring
- Red fruit attracts birds
- Scarlet to purple fall foliage

### REDBUD

*Cercis canadensis*



- Brilliant pink early spring blooms
- Good specimen tree
- Attracts Hummingbirds, songbirds, & pollinators

### RED MAPLE

*Acer Rubrum*



- Brilliant fall color
- Important food source and nesting habitat for birds
- Fast-growing & hardy

### SWAMP WHITE OAK

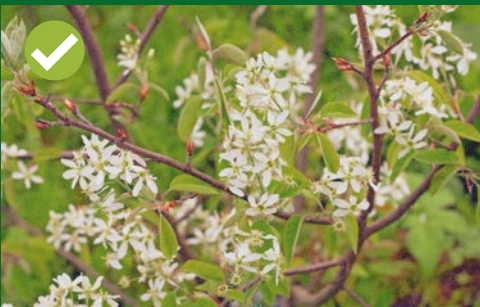
*Quercus bicolor*



- Extremely high wildlife value
- Smaller oak, suitable for many spaces
- Interesting bark

### SHADBLOW SERVICEBERRY

*Amelanchier canadensis*



- Early spring blooms attract pollinators
- Birds & people love the edible berries
- Bronze fall foliage

### FRINGETREE

*Chionanthus virginicus*



- Ornamental small tree with fragrant, unique flowers
- Berries attract birds
- High pollinator value



## ABOUT AUDUBON SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania (ASWP) is an environmental education and conservation engagement organization serving Pittsburgh and the surrounding region. Our mission is to connect the people of southwestern Pennsylvania to birds and nature through our programs, projects, and places. Our nature centers and reserves—Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve, Buffalo Creek Nature Park, Succop Nature Park, and Todd Nature Reserve—offer over 12 miles of trails through more than 600 tranquil acres that provide an oasis for individuals, families, and groups to explore and reconnect with nature at their own pace.

ASWP works with individuals, public, nonprofit, and private entities to improve habitat across southwestern Pennsylvania through initiatives such as the Certified Backyard Habitat and Bird-Friendly Community Recognition programs. Please visit [aswp.org](http://aswp.org) or call (412) 963-6100 to learn more.

## AUDUBON CENTER FOR NATIVE PLANTS

Opened in 2000 and located at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve, Audubon Center for Native Plants (ACNP) is the region's largest provider of western Pennsylvania native perennials. At our native plant nursery, anyone may purchase plants. Our staff will help you to choose the correct plants for your habitat goals. Landscapers, nonprofits, and municipalities receive a 20% discount. ACNP has successfully propagated over 150 species of native plants and has over 120 species on-hand for sale during the growing season. Volunteer support helps us to grow and care for thousands of native plants each year, primarily from hand-collected seed. Visit us from May through October to explore our selection of native perennials, shrubs, and trees.

**Contact ASWP for assistance with incorporating native plants and eliminating invasive species in your retail nursery operations, landscape designs, neighborhood parks, or habitat management efforts.**



(412) 963-6100

[www.aswp.org](http://www.aswp.org)

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