The Obnoxious Weeds – Ornamental Plants with Bad Manners

What do butterfly bush, yellow flag iris, and bachelor buttons have in common? First, they are all popular ornamental plants found in many home gardens. Second, they share a place on the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board's "E*ducation List of Obnoxious Weeds*".

The "Education List of Obnoxious Weeds" is a listing of popular horticultural plants that escape from intentional plantings and gain widespread distribution in non-home garden areas. They are plants recognized by the Weed Board as invasive. However, they are not currently listed as Class A, Class B, or Class C weeds (plants the Weed Board regulates/controls). Nor are they on the Monitor List (plants under consideration for regulating). See their Printable Noxious Weed List for a complete listing of the State's noxious weeds. The Weed Board created the Education List of Obnoxious Weeds to warn gardeners, landscape designers, and nursery owners of potential problems with listed ornamental plants.

The Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board's Education List of Obnoxious Weeds:

Butterfly bush (*Buddleia* spp.)

English ivy (*Hedera helix*)

Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor*)

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Morning glory (*Convolvulus*)

Spurges (*Euphorbia* spp.)

Spurge laurel (*Daphne laureola*)

Saltcedars (*Tamarix* spp.)

Water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*)

Welsh poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*)

Yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudocarus*)

Bachelor buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*)

Knapweed (*Centaurea* spp.)

Some of the listed species, such as English ivy and Himalayan blackberries, have already permanently established themselves in our wild areas. They were originally introduced as ornamental plants for home gardens or as cultivated crops, and quickly spread to infest large areas. They crowd out native vegetation, altering the balance of existing ecosystems. Each plant on the list has the potential to do the same. So what do environmentally conscientious home gardeners do if they are currently growing a listed plant? Several things:

- Remove the plant and replace it with an alternate plant with better manners.
- Avoid these plants entirely if you live near wild areas or near natural waterways.
- Deadhead, thoroughly, all plants that spread by seed – don't allow them to set seeds.
- Contain aggressive root systems with effective root barriers – or plant only in containers.
- Remove seedling plants on a regular basis.
- Remove existing infestations of aggressive plants following recommended procedures.
- Recommend warning labels to nurseries selling these plants.
- Inform your gardening friends and neighbors of the potential problems with growing these varieties.

General information about each listed plant follows:

Butterfly bush (*Buddleia* spp.)

Many species are known, but only two are widely available as ornamental plants: *Buddleia alternifolia* (Fountain Butterfly Bush) and *Buddleia davidii* (Butterfly Bush or Summer Lilac). They are medium to large-sized shrubs desired for their easy growth, long bloom period, and attractiveness to nectar-gathering animals. They grow rapidly each season, often die back close to the ground each winter, then re-grow from hardy roots. They are prolific flower producers over a long period, and reproduce by seed.

As most home gardeners learn, butterfly bush sprouts easily from seed. Since they grow so quickly, and reproduce so easily, they can become garden pests. In many areas of Washington State, they have already escaped their home gardens and can be found in wild areas.

English ivy (*Hedera helix*)

English ivy is an evergreen climbing vine, widely sold by nurseries as a low-maintenance, fast growing groundcover. Vines creep along the ground, and attach to the bark of trees and other structures by way of numerous, small root-like structures, which exude a glue-like substance. The leaves are dark green and waxy, with many different leaf forms. If the plant receives enough sunlight, greenish-white flowers appear in the fall, followed by mature fruit in the spring. The fruit is black with a fleshy outer covering enclosing a few hard seeds. English ivy reproduces by layering (stems root when in contact with the soil) and by seed, which is dispersed to new areas primarily by birds.

English ivy is an aggressive invader. Once established, it can be expected to move beyond its intended border into neighboring yards, parks, and forested areas. It forms a dense ground covering mat, smothering native vegetation. Climbing vines quickly ramble up trees, searching for sunlight, which enables the plant to produce flowers, followed by seed-bearing fruits. The host trees lose vigor over time, becoming susceptible to wind damage and disease.

English ivy is difficult to remove once established. Older vines are known to reach a foot in diameter. Manual removal is the desired method, but chemical controls are also available. See the No Ivy League for additional plant information and eradication methods. Efforts are underway to add this plant to the Washington State Noxious Weed List.

Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor*)

Himalayan blackberry is a robust, sprawling, more or less evergreen shrub of the Rose Family (Rosaceae). The shrubs appear as "great mounds or banks" with some of the canes standing up to 10 feet tall. Other canes grow along the ground, can reach 20-40 feet long, frequently taking root at the tips, where daughter plants grow. The canes have large thorns and grow rapidly, as much as 25 feet in one season. The plants have white flowers in the spring, producing fruit that ripens from midsummer to autumn. Himalayan blackberries reproduce vegetatively by layering (stems root when in contact with the soil), suckering roots, and by seed. The berries are attractive to birds, which widely distribute the seeds. Blackberries also readily propagate from root pieces and cane cuttings. In less than 2 years a cane cutting can produce a thicket 15 feet in diameter.

Contrary to its common name, Himalayan blackberry is a native of Western Europe. It was probably first introduced to North America in 1885 as a cultivated crop. Himalayan blackberry was naturalized along the West Coast by 1945. It forms impenetrable thickets in wastelands, pastures, and forests - displacing natural vegetation.

With proper management, areas infested with Himalayan blackberries can be restored to more desirable vegetation. Mechanical removal or burning may be the most effective ways of removing mature plants. A long-term eradication program is necessary due to the plant's ability to re-grow from root and stem cuttings. Chemical control is also an option, if conducted properly. See Big Woody Weeds – Controlling Blackberries and Broom for general plant information and eradication methods.

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)

Ilex aquifolium common names are English Holly or Christmas Holly. They are evergreen shrubs or small trees, and many varieties are commonly sold for home gardens. The varieties are highly variable in leaf shape, color, and degree of spininess. Most require male and female plants to produce red berries, which attract birds, thereby spreading seeds.

Morning glory (*Convolvulus*)

Convolvulus arvensis, or field bindweed, is a Class C weed in the State of Washington. The *Convolvulus* varieties commonly found for home gardens include *C. cneorum* (bush morning glory), *C. mauritanicus* or *sabatius* (ground morning glory) and *C. tricolor* (dwarf morning glory). All species have funnel-shaped flowers much like common vining morning glories, Ipomoea. In fact, Ipomoea are sometimes sold as *Convolvulus*.

Spurges (*Euphorbia* spp.)

The *Euphorbia* genus of plants is quite large, with many varieties sold for home gardens. Two varieties, *E. oblangata* (eggleaf spurge) and *E. esula* (leafy spurge) are Class A and Class B weeds, respectively. The "flowers" on euphorbias are really groups of colored bracts; their true flowers are inconspicuous. Many euphorbias are succulents; these often mimic cacti in appearance and are as diverse in form and size.

Spurge laurel (*Daphne laureola*)

Bushy, evergreen shrub with leathery, glossy, dark green leaves. In late winter and early spring, bears pale green or yellow-green flowers; followed by fleshy, ovoid black fruit. *D. laureola* subsp. *philippi* is mildly suckering.

Saltcedars (*Tamarix* spp.)

Most saltcedars, or tamarisks, are deciduous shrubs or small trees growing to 12-15 feet in height, forming dense thickets. Slender branches and gray-green, scale-like foliage characterize saltcedars. From March to September, large numbers of pink to white flowers appear in dense masses on 2-inch-long spikes at branch tips. Saltcedars spread by creeping roots and seeds. Each flower can produce thousands of tiny seeds, which are dispersed by wind and water. Seedlings require extended periods of soil saturation for establishment.

Saltcedars are fire-adapted species and have long taproots that allow them to intercept deep water tables and interfere with natural aquatic systems. They form monocultures, crowding out native vegetation in wetland areas, disrupting natural wetland ecosystems.

Once saltcedar escapes its backyard borders into natural areas, it requires a long-term commitment to eradicate. A variety of methods have been used in the management of saltcedar, including mechanical, chemical and biological. The most effective management policy probably involves a combination of these. See Salt Cedar for plant information and eradication methods. The Tamarix ramosissima is a Class A weed in the State of Washington.

Water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*)

Water hyacinth is a free-floating aquatic plant sold for backyard ponds. Leaves are thick, waxy, rounded and glossy and rise well above the water surface on stalks. Plants produce a single, tall flower stalk with 8-15 showy lilac blue blossoms. Water hyacinth reproduces vegetatively by short runner stems that radiate from the base of the plant to form daughter plants, and also reproduces by seed.

Water hyacinth forms large, free-floating, monospecific mats that compete with other aquatic species for light, nutrients, and oxygen. They quickly crowd out native aquatic vegetation, altering natural aquatic ecosystems. Once thought to be a problem in warm climates only, the species is now known to survive in cooler climates.

Small infestations of water hyacinth can be controlled by hand pulling. Chemical and biological controls may be required for large areas; however, chemicals damage or kill other aquatic organisms so have limited use in wildland areas. See UC IPM Online: How to Manage Pests: Pests in Gardens and Landscapes: Invasive Plants for plant information and eradication methods.

Welsh poppy (*Meconopsis cambrica*)

Welsh poppy is a cousin to the Himalayan poppy. It is a short-lived perennial, but self-sows profusely.

Yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)

Yellow flag iris is a beautiful ornamental plant prized for its foliage and large yellow flowers; also its ability to grow in moist areas and heavy soil. Native to Europe, but now found worldwide in temperate regions; seeds float,

aiding plant's dispersal. Control plant spread by deadheading, making sure to remove all seed heads - especially if planted near waterways.

Bachelor buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*)

Bachelor buttons, or cornflowers, are easy to grow annual plants. They self-sow easily, returning year after year in favorable locations.

Knapweed (*Centaurea* spp.)

Out of some 500 species, only a dozen or so are widely cultivated in home gardens. These include the following ornamental plants: *C. americana* (basket flowers), *C. cineraria* or *candidissima* (dusty miller), *C. cyanus* (cornflowers or bachelor's button), *C. gymnocarpa* (dusty miller), *C. hypoleuca*, *C. montana*, and *C. moschata* (sweet sultans). Most self-seed easily. There are 10 varieties of knapweed on the State's Noxious Weed List, most are Class A and B weeds.

Source

Washington State Weed Control Board