

Are noxious weeds illegal?

Question: My friend says that I need to take out my butterfly bush because it is illegal in Oregon. How can that be? I bought it at a retail store locally! Is this true?

Answer: Don't panic! Your friend is referring to the fact that some types of butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) are considered a noxious weed for the state of Oregon. This can be very confusing to a home gardener.

In early January, I discussed plants we have in our gardens that might grow too vigorously and end up causing us extra work trying to keep them contained. These plants can be as simple as an annual flower that re-seeds itself and comes up in new beds. On a much broader state and national level, there are plants that may have been introduced innocently enough as a pretty or useful specimen, only to find out that they grow too well and end up causing big problems.

In today's column, I'm going to give a little introduction to the problem of noxious and invasive plants – and hopefully clear up the butterfly bush dilemma.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture, as well as Douglas County, have noxious weed policies and control recommendations. What makes a “noxious weed”? Both groups use these criteria to evaluate non-native plants:

1. They cause economic losses to agricultural and natural resources industries.
2. They endanger native flora and fauna by encroaching onto wild lands.
3. They may hamper the enjoyment and full use of recreational lands.
4. They are poisonous or otherwise harmful to people and/or animals.

Both the State of Oregon and Douglas County evaluate plants based on the four properties above, as well as how easily they reproduce, how widely they are distributed in the state or county and how difficult they are to control.

They have assigned a rating



English ivy has become a major invasive villain in the Pacific Northwest, from British Columbia to California.



English and Atlantic ivy distribution is widespread on the western side of the Cascades, where they are considered very invasive.

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system for identified species to prioritize which plants are most concerning.

The state rating system is as follows: “A” plants occur in small infestations and makes eradication or containment possible. “B” plants are economically important but also abundant. Biological control is preferred if available, and control is on a case-by-case basis. “T” plants are chosen from the A and B lists but considered a focus by the state. (Douglas County also has a “W” category, for Watch List.)

Now that we know more than we ever thought we'd need to know, how does that affect a home gardener? Most of the plants on the noxious lists are



Scotch broom was widely planted in western Oregon for dune stabilization and as an ornamental along highway corridors. It is now the most extensive forest weed species and a significant source of pollen affecting allergy sufferers.

true weeds – we would never plant them intentionally. However, a few, like butterfly bush for example, are more ornamental.

Wouldn't you assume that none of the listed plants would be available for purchase locally or from a reputable online

source? That's what I thought, until I prowled about a little online and found English ivy available to ship to me. Yikes!

I called one of Oregon's noxious weed specialists to find out if this is a common problem and was told that it does happen, and they do appreciate

gardeners alerting them if they see a listed plant for sale either locally or by mail (one caveat on mail order – often an Oregon-listed plant is fine to ship to other states, and reputable nurseries will know that and won't ship to Oregon, but it will still appear for sale in their catalogue.)

Sometimes plants are found to be a problem long after they have been widely planted and then are added to the list of invasives/noxious weeds.

In the case of the common butterfly bush, *Buddleia davidii* (“B” list), if you planted it before 2004, which is when it was listed as a noxious weed here in Oregon, you are not required to remove it, but it is recommended that you dead-head the flowers before they can go to seed.

Other well-known ornamental plants that have made the Oregon list are Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius* – “B”), gorse (*Ulex europaeus* – “B”) and English ivy (*Hedera helix* – “B”).

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Listed noxious plants started out being planted because they had traits the home gardener appreciated, such as ease of growth, beauty or interesting form. In their own native environments, they are part of the ecosystem for that area.

However, if they grow too well here and start invading our wild lands,

they can crowd out native vegetation and cause irreparable harm.

If I have piqued your interest, you can view the complete lists of noxious weeds for the state of Oregon at tinyurl.com/4braazre or for Douglas County at tinyurl.com/yrsmjb65.

I plan to discuss the butterfly bush in detail in my next article, due out in March. You can plant a lovely variety that will

not become invasive in our area, and we will explore those options.

Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.