

Attracting Butterflies



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Red-flowering currant grows 3-9 feet tall and blooms from February to April in shades of pink or white, depending on the variety.

Question: I want to plant a butterfly bush to attract butterflies to my yard, however, I've heard that Oregon classifies them as a weed. Is that true?

Answer: It's good to think about our butterflies and other pollinators as we plan our gardens. Butterfly bushes will attract butterflies because of the nectar they produce.

However, did you know that not one species of native butterfly (caterpillar stage) eats the leaves of a butterfly bush? Butterflies need plants on which to lay their eggs, which hatch into caterpillars, which feed on that host.

As I discussed in my last article in February, the state of Oregon has classified *Buddleia davidii*, the common butterfly bush, as a noxious weed and it is not allowed to be sold or planted here. If it was planted before 2004, you do not have to remove it, as it wasn't listed as a noxious species until that year.

If you do have that variety in your garden already, be sure to dead-head the flowers



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after blooming so it doesn't set any seed.

B. davidii is a native of China. It produces lovely purple flowers, but those flowers produce millions of seeds which germinate easily and remain viable for several years. West of the Cascades, this plant does very well. In fact, it does so well here that it can choke out native vegetation.

Why is this so important? Well, our native pollinators depend on native plants for survival and while *B. davidii* may produce tasty nectar for butterflies, it does not serve as a host plant for them to lay their eggs and produce the next generation.

Plant breeders have been working on overcoming the problems of *Buddleia*. There are some varieties of butterfly



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bush that have been developed to be sterile, therefore not able to reseed themselves and wreak havoc on our native plants. You can find varieties that are pink, purple, white and shades of peach in the approved "Flutterby" series.

Oregon State University is conducting trials and research in the effort to identify *Buddleia* varieties and crosses that will not become invasive. This is an ongoing effort for the current list of approved non-invasive varieties, the state of

Oregon's list of approved *Buddleia* varieties, can be found at tinyurl.com/56v7x57c.

Buddleia is a plant that adds color and certainly attracts butterflies to your garden (one article I read equated the nectar they get from *Buddleia* to our junk food!) It is easy to grow – just give it well drained soil, full sun and prune it down each spring. Depending on the variety, it can grow from 2-12 feet tall.

What plants can you plant instead of butterfly bush? A couple

of suggested native plant substitutions are the red-flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) and *Ceanothus*, which was covered in this column in February. The currant grows 3-9 feet tall and blooms from February to April in shades of pink or white, depending on the variety. The fruits are attractive to birds. *Ceanothus* is available in many sizes and forms. One bonus is that it is drought tolerant.

The butterfly bush has remained popular because of its ease of care and ability to attract butterflies. Just make sure to plant one of the varieties approved by the state of Oregon or try one of the native substitutions mentioned above.

Happy gardening!

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.