

Yard and Garden – November 03, 2012- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

It speaks to us but perhaps not in the same manner as we read about in the book of Exodus when the burning bush spoke to Moses.

By mid-autumn, burning bush displays prominently its dazzling beauty to all who take notice. Nearly every year I am questioned by someone, “What is the name of that beautiful shrub with the blazing-red leaves?”

I respond, “*Euonymus alatus*.”

“What’s a *Euonymus alatus*?” he or she asks.

“*Euonymus alatus* is its genus/species name, but more commonly it is called a burning bush,” I reply.

Burning bush is a fitting name. Its fiery red appearance ignites the autumn landscape wherever it grows. Nebraska’s autumn foliage color change traditionally involves shades of yellow, gold and brown. Although these colors are attractive, a splash of red greatly enhances the setting. Burning bush delivers that splash. As a result, the nursery industry touts this flamboyant quality as a key selling point. Rather than calling it a *Euonymus alatus*, the industry generally advertises this shrub as a euonymus burning bush, or simply burning bush.

Indigenous to northeastern Asia, the burning bush was imported to the United States in the mid-1800s. Capable of withstanding Nebraska’s searing heat in the summer, this alien shrub can also endure our frigid winters. It makes an ideal shrub for all seasons.

Burning bush transplants easily and requires little maintenance. It performs well in all types of soil. Its dense dark green foliage makes it an attractive shrub during the summer months. Growing burning bush in full sun yields its greatest show of autumn red foliage; however, the plant will successfully grow in part shade. Scale infestation can be an occasional problem for burning bush; otherwise, this shrub has few pest problems.

Burning bush can be grown as an individual specimen or as an accent plant growing in a grouping of other shrubs or flowers. Although not necessary, burning bush readily tolerates pruning, thus making it an ideal candidate for a hedge.

The standard burning bush attains heights of over fifteen feet when left alone and not pruned. It has the appearance of a small tree when grown in this manner. Since its introduction to the United States, numerous



cultivars of burning bush have been developed. The most commonly found cultivar is 'Compactus'. This name can be deceiving. 'Compactus' is promoted as a dwarf variety. When I see the word dwarf, I generally think of something small in stature. However, dwarf, in this case, means capable of reaching eight to ten feet in height. The cultivar 'Rudy Haag' is a true dwarf. It is hardy to Zone 5 and matures at a height of only three to four feet. Other than smaller in size, 'Rudy Haag' offers all the attributes of a standard burning bush.



After burning bush drops its fiery red leaves in late autumn, it continues to offer winter interest. This shrub has odd-looking branches. Rather than being smooth, the twigs are lined with cork-like ridges, often referred to as wings. This feature has caused the shrub to be called winged euonymus. Furthermore, attached near the ends of these strangely shaped twigs are tiny red fruits that provide our feathered friends with an often much needed winter snack. As I stated



before, *Euonymus alatus* (burning bush) is a plant for all seasons.

Right now, burning bushes are speaking to us. Take the time to listen. Although I'm quite certain they're not asking us to lead anyone to the Promised Land, they are shouting and resonating loudly, "Pay attention to me; I am beautiful."