

As another growing season draws to an end, the landscape slowly and vividly becomes infused with shades of yellow, orange and red. One such



shrub that epitomizes the radiant beauty of fall is the *Euonymus alatus* commonly known as burning bush, or winged euonymus. This popular and widely-planted shrub is not only planted for its crimson fall foliage, it is extensively planted because it tolerates poor

soils and has relatively few pest problems.

Interestingly, this admired shrub has an undesirable feature with which you might not be familiar. In sixteen states the burning bush is classified as an invasive plant. Fortunately, Nebraska is not one of those sixteen states. In the states where it is declared invasive, homeowners are encouraged not to plant burning bush because it has escaped cultivation and has invaded natural woodlands. Unfortunately, plants deemed invasive, such as burning bush, are capable of spreading aggressively beyond their normal range, eventually crowding out native plant communities and totally upsetting the ecosystem.

I share this information with you because fall is an opportune time to plant shrubs, trees and perennials. Before you consider planting, I urge you to take note of plants known or suspected of being invasive. The website <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives/invasiveplantslist.htm> reports what plants are potentially invasive as well as those plants classified as being noxious weeds in the State of Nebraska.

Many plants are naturally aggressive, but not necessarily invasive. *Ajuga reptans*, commonly called bugleweed, or *Vinca minor*, known as periwinkle, are both non-native plants (exotics) introduced to the U.S. as ornamentals. Such plants are capable of spreading throughout the garden if allowed to flourish, but neither is known to overrun it completely. Fortunately, the vast majority of exotics are not aggressive.

Geography matters. A plant that spreads aggressively and is declared invasive in one region may be perfectly well-behaved in another. For many years we have grown *Colocasia esculenta*, commonly called elephant ear, in our flower borders. Plants of this genus have



bold foliage and can add a tropical look to any garden. *Colocasia esculenta*, commonly called wild taro, has been declared invasive in Florida. Gardeners are advised not to plant it. Because this plant is only hardy in Zones 9 through 11, it is incapable of surviving Nebraska's winters; thus, it is far from being invasive when grown here. As a matter of fact, each year after the first frost, I dig my elephant ears and save the bulbs for the following season.

Some native plants are deemed aggressive. Anyone who has grown the native plant *Monarda didyma*, commonly called bee balm, has surely discovered how quickly it can spread throughout the flower border. Interestingly, this particular native plant is featured in a book I own titled, "Weeds of Nebraska and the Great Plains." Although bee balm is aggressive, I

enjoy growing it. Knowing its growing habits takes a little extra work to keep it in bounds.

The following plants are considered invasive in many parts of the country.

Trees:

- Tree of heaven
- Russian olive
- Amur maple
- Siberian elm
- Eastern red cedar
- Salt cedar

Shrubs:

- Japanese barberry
- Privet
- Bush honeysuckle
- Burning bush

Ground covers:

- Crown vetch
- English ivy
- Oriental bittersweet
- Pachysandra
- Japanese fleecflower
- Bishop's weed

Fall is a beautiful time of the year and an opportune time to plant shrubs, trees and perennials. Know what plants are invasive, and perhaps you might wish to plant alternatives.