

Avoid Planting Ornamental Pear Trees

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Ornamental pears like Bradford, Chanticleer, Redspire, Cleveland and others are commonly planted trees because of their white spring blooms and compact size.

Unfortunately, ornamental or Callery pear, has become an invasive species taking over woodland understories, urban lots, and vacant fields.

When I recommend not planting ornamental pear, people often voice that they have not seen any invasive issues with them so why not plant them?

The main issues with ornamental pear have not occurred to a large degree in Nebraska yet, meaning we are in a good position to prevent this from happening in the future. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

So what are the issues with ornamental pear? According to David Olson with the Nebraska Forest Service, issues include its invasive nature and characteristics that make it undesirable in the landscape.

Ornamental pear has been shown to be an aggressive invasive species, springing up in disturbed urban areas and on the edges of farm fields. When escaped, wild types revert and tend to develop two to four inch long thorns that have been known to puncture tires of farm and other equipment.

When the trees outcompete native plants in an area, Olson says recent studies have shown drastically altered communities of arthropods, like insects and spiders, which could impact the local food web.

Characteristics that can make it undesirable in landscapes include weak branch attachments, foliar rust disease, and not the best smelling flowers.

Because of the trees compact form, it tends to have co-dominant branches which create weak spots or attachments. Co-dominant branches can lead to branch failure even in mild storms.

Ornamental pear is highly susceptible to the disease cedar-hawthorn rust. This was one of my most common calls this summer. I did not see many ornamental pears that were not affected by it.

The disease causes numerous reddish orange spots to form on leaves. While this disease rarely kills a tree, it can be unsightly and lead to early leaf drop.

Olson also mentions that the white flowers that look so nice in the spring are pollinated by flies, and so they tend to have an aroma that one would think attracts flies.

So what is the ounce of prevention we need to practice to avoid having to apply a pound of cure? Olson says for starters, we need to stop planting ornamental pear in home and business landscapes, parks, schools and along streets.

And if you have a property where ornamental pear starts to grow wild, it would be wise to remove these volunteer trees before they get out of control.

Many towns in the US have already made it illegal to plant ornamental pear. Unfortunately it remains a readily available and fairly cheap tree for homeowners and developers to use.

Alternative trees to plant include serviceberry (Amelanchier), Japanese tree lilac, disease resistant cultivars of ornamental crabapple, thornless cockspur hawthorn, Amur maackia and American hornbeam.