

## The Natives are restless

And well they might be. Exotic plants from around the globe offer today's gardener the promise of non-stop, summer long bloom times, resistance to pests and disease, ease of care and showy seasonal interest. They are taking over the role of native plants in the landscape and there is reason for concern. Some of these non-native species are also invasive.

According to the **Jersey-Friendly Yards** website- *"Scientists suspect that an invasive plant has a competitive edge over native plants, since the insects, diseases, and animals that naturally control its growth in its native range are often not present in its introduced area. New Jersey's native animals depend on native plants for food, shelter, and nesting sites. When invasive plants replace the natives, the entire ecosystem can be disrupted. Habitat changes caused by invasive species have led to the decline of about 42% of the threatened and endangered species in the United States."*

There are a few of these invasive species which are quite common to LBI landscapes. We will identify them, offer some native alternatives and describe some of the additional benefits of our home-grown plants.



**Butterfly bush** is an extremely popular plant in our local landscapes. There is also some confusion about whether or not this plant is beneficial, especially since it attracts huge numbers of butterflies. For example, MonarchWatch.org has butterfly bush at the top of their recommended planting list, with no disclaimer that it's listed as an invasive plant in over 20 states and counting, and also no instruction that if you've got this problematic plant in your garden, you **MUST** deadhead it before it produces the abundant seeds that are wreaking such havoc. Listed here are some of the concerns taken from the Native Plant Society of NJ, National Wildlife Federation and National Park Service:

- **Butterfly Bush** The wild species *Buddleia davidii* spreads rapidly, invading riverbanks, reforested areas, and open fields. **It forms thick, shrubby thickets that preclude the development of other native species such as willow.**
- Each Butterfly Bush produces over 100,000 seeds, and they are distributed in the wind, so even though you may not see seedlings popping up in your garden, **your Butterfly Bush is probably responsible for spreading devastation in natural areas like stream banks and disturbed industrial sites.**
- Because butterfly bushes offer copious amounts of nectar, they become extremely attractive to pollinators, distracting them from other native co-flowering species, and reducing the native's reproductive success which eventually also harms the native's populations.



**Lythrum salicaria L. (purple loosestrife).** From NJDEP's "Overview of Nonindigenous Plant Species in NJ- *"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that it covers more than 400,000 acres (USFWS 1998). It is one of the most widespread invasive plants occurring in New Jersey. It occurs abundantly in wetlands throughout the state.*

- *Once it becomes established, purple loosestrife displaces native vegetation through rapid growth and **heavy seed production**. Uncontrolled, purple loosestrife eventually forms a near monoculture that alters the structure of natural*

*plant communities and reduces biological diversity. Dense stands can change drainage patterns by restricting the flow of water. Wildlife can be affected by the displacement of indigenous food items such as cattails and pondweed. Waterfowl are threatened by the loss of favorable habitat to purple loosestrife".*

- **Lythrum virgatum 'Morden's Gleam'** is a seedless, non-invasive Loosestrife. It grows 3-5 feet tall and in July and August bears beautiful tall spikes of star-shaped, rose-pink flowers.
- **Liatris Spicata-** Gayfeather or Blazing Star is an attractive alternative, with stalks of purple flowers very similar to those of loosestrife.



**Berberis thunbergii (Japanese barberry).** Also from the NJDEP Overview- *"Barberry can grow in sun or shade and in many soil types. Branches touching the ground can root, and new shoots can develop from underground roots. Barberry can grow so thick in the understory of open forests that it shades out indigenous understory plants and decreases biological diversity. This could adversely affect birds and other animals dependent on the native plant. Severe infestations of barberry can form nearly impenetrable thorny thickets that impact the recreational value of natural lands.*

- *While most of the exotics on this list are a problem partly because they don't support wildlife, barberry has been shown to serve as excellent habitat for a certain kind of wildlife - the species of tick that carries Lyme disease!*
- *The following native shrubs are suggested as alternatives to Japanese barberry for landscape use: winterberry holly (Ilex verticillata), inkberry holly (Ilex glabra), New Jersey tea (Ceanothus americanus), bayberry (Myrica pensylvanica), wild hydrangea (Hydrangea arborescens), ninebark (Physocarpus opulifolius)".*



**Euonymus alatus (Burning Bush)** and all its cultivars have been identified as a threat to natural areas because **they seed in so prolifically and become dominant, forcing out other important plants.** Despite its **invasive nature**, it remains very popular and is widely sold for its hardiness, winged stems and intense red foliage in the fall.

- Low bush and high bush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium* and *V. corymbosum*) are often suggested as replacements for winged euonymus because they produce outstanding red fall color on leaves of similar size, shape and texture.

## Alternative native species for planting in NJ:

- ***Asclepias incarnata*- Swamp Milkweed, Pink Milkweed**- This milkweed is native to most of the USA and eastern Canada with the exception being the west coast. It is a nice addition to a butterfly garden and is also attractive to many species of butterflies as a nectar plant. Swamp milkweed is **not invasive** as some other milkweeds are and behaves well in the garden. Likes moist soil/wetlands
  - Or [Asclepias tuberosa](#)- butterfly WEED (not butterfly Bush)- has a taproot, will do well in dry soils and will spread by self-seeding. It is not the favorite of Monarchs although swallowtails, bees and hummingbirds.
  - Do NOT plant common Milkweed- *A. syriaca* in your formal garden. (spreads by rhizomes and is difficult to control, creeping everywhere.
  - Whorled Milkweed- *A. verticillata* is a good choice for dry areas. It may not do as well in a manicured garden as it also spreads through underground rhizomes however it is not as invasive as common milkweed.
- **Monarda- Bee Balms**
  - *M. punctata*- horsemint, spotted bee balm. Native to NJ available from Pinelands Preservation Alliance. Good plant for barrier islands, coastal plains. Attracts pollinators. Grows in dry soil; flowers June, July.
  - *M. fistulosa*- wild bergamot. Wild Bergamot is a highly adaptable, wildlife-friendly perennial. Its showy, tubular, white, pink, or purple flowers form round, wispy clusters atop tall stems, July through September. The foliage is fragrant, offering additional interest in the garden. Wild Bergamot is valued by hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees, which benefit from the nectar.
  - *M. didyma*- scarlet bee balm. Flowers June to August.

- **Clethra Alnifolia- Summersweet.** *The Morton Arboretum says- “A wide variety of butterflies and songbirds are attracted to summersweet clethra for its nectar and seeds. Native to the eastern United States, it provides exceptional four season interest with its lustrous green leaves in the spring, spiky white or pink fragrant summer flowers, golden yellow autumn leaves, and interesting, delicate dried seed capsules in winter.”*
  - **Asters & Goldenrod-** more good news from Jersey-Friendly Yards- *“Forget chrysanthemums --please! Plant our native asters and help the bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Their one issue is aster wilt, which can be fended off by good air circulation, which you have at the always-breezy Shore. Try the hybrid goldenrods, such as 'Fireworks' or 'Crown of Gold,' or go with the species, which grows wild along the coast. Why this works: Many gardens look pretty tired in late summer. This pair will perk things up with a fresh burst of bloom in August and September. Asters offer acid pinks and blues, pairing nicely with the mellow yellows of goldenrod --which is **not responsible for your fall allergies**. Its pollen requires insects, not wind, for propagation.”*
  - **Baccharis halimifolia**
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## Pollinators and their importance:

The Monarch butterfly has become the poster child for saving the environment. Their annual migratory journey can encompass 4,000 miles and go through 4 generations of butterflies.

*According to The Nature Conservancy- “Declining monarch populations across North America could be a sign that other elements of their habitats, such as wildflowers or other pollinators, might be fading too. We need to protect the balance and biodiversity of our natural ecosystems for humans and nature to thrive together.*

*The disappearance of large areas of native plant habitats is a major contributor to the decline of pollinator populations worldwide. Another major factor is climate change. For monarchs, if temperatures get too warm during spring, they might migrate farther north than before. Then when winter comes, the longer trip to overwintering sites in Mexico could overtax them and decrease their reproduction.*

*Changes in the monarchs’ migration patterns impact diverse ecosystems across the continent, and ultimately affect our human food systems, too. Although butterflies are among the more noticeable—and charming—pollinators when they visit a garden or field, bees, hummingbirds, moths, and bats also play an important role pollinating many food crops, as well as 75% of the world’s flowering plants”.*

There are many helpful websites to guide you on your way to choosing the right native plantings for your garden. Check out these selections:

- **Ocean County Soil Conservation District** offers for download the following brochure, published by the Barnegat Bay Partnership- [“Going Native: A Guide to Natural Landscaping with Native Plants in the Barnegat Bay Watershed”](#). It offers tips, suggestions, and easy to use plans for creating a natural landscape for your yard.
  - Numerous links and resources
- **Native Plant Society of NJ**
  - Comprehensive list of [NJ Nurseries with native plants](#)
- [Jersey Friendly Yards](#)
  - Native Plant lists
  - NJ invasive plant lists
  - Landscaping in the Pinelands
  - **Native Plant Gardens at Jakes Branch County Park**
    - Includes the 5 different types of native plant gardens designed and installed by The American Littoral Society”.
  - Jersey Friendly Plant Database- for your region- complete with photos
- **Pinelands Preservation Alliance**
  - Spring and Fall native plant sales with hard-to-find varieties
- **Rutgers Water Resources Page**
  - Backyard stormwater management
  - Rain garden manuals and training