An invasive plant is a plant that is not native to our area and spreads rapidly. These plants infest natural areas and can harm the environment and the economy. They are so aggressive that they can overpower and force out native plants, which provide food and cover for native birds and insects.

According to the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society about a third of the 2,900 plant species growing outside of cultivation in Indiana are non-native, but only a small fraction of those are considered to be invasive.

Many invasive species have been used in landscaping. But because they are so aggressive and can destroy natural plant communities, a rule is being considered that would make it illegal to buy, sell or plant them in Indiana. You may have heard of some of these plants and know that they cause issues. However, you may be surprised that some plants that have long been used in landscaping are now designated as invasive and should not be used.

You may find that some of these species continue to be available for purchase in the landscape department of large retail stores in the area. Many groups such as the Tri-State Watershed Alliance and the City of Fort Wayne encourage you NOT to buy or use these plants. Here are just a few of the most common along with a description of the issues they can cause:

**Callery (Bradford) Pear** – *Pyrus calleryana*

These trees can grow to be up to 30-feet tall and until recently were commonly used in landscaping because of their dense white spring flowers. The problem is that these trees produce large numbers of fruits and their seeds are spread by birds, particularly starlings. Seedlings can become dense in forests and outcompete native trees.

**Burning Bush** – *Euonymus alatus*

This deciduous shrub is popular because its leaves turn bright red in the fall. However, they will create dense thickets in forests that displace native plants.

**Autumn Olive** – *Elaeagnus umbellate*

Long a popular landscape plant because their fast growth and slivery leaves, these plants increase nitrogen in the soil which encourages the growth of other invasive plants.

**Japanese Honeysuckle** – *Lonicera japonica*

This is a woody, semi-evergreen climbing vine with sweet-smelling yellow and white flowers and black berries. The vines will cover native plants and out-compete them for light. Their aggressive root systems will starve native plants of water and nutrients.

**Purple Loosestrife** – *Lythrum salicaria*

A perennial typically found in ditches and along roadsides, these plants reduce habitat for native birds and will crowd out native plant species.

**Chinese Maiden Grass** – *Miscanthus sinensis*

A perennial, ornamental grass with feathery flower spikes. Also a common landscape plant, this grass can easily spread outside planting beds and displace native vegetation.

What can you do in your neighborhood to help control the spread of these invasive species?

First, check your landscaping for the presence of invasive species and remove these plants if you have them. Some may be difficult to get rid of, but be persistent.

When selecting landscape plants, avoid invasive species. Ask your nursery for alternative selections that are native and non-invasive. Area Master Gardeners are also a great source for information on appropriate plants that can help to support native birds and pollinators. Encourage people in your neighborhood to do the same.

Volunteer to help remove invasive species in parks and along Fort Wayne’s river banks.

Report invasive plants through ReportIN at [www.eddmaps.org/indiana/](http://www.eddmaps.org/indiana/)

Much more information on landscaping with non-invasive plants in Indiana may be found at [www.inpaws.org/landscaping](http://www.inpaws.org/landscaping).