

The Grapevine

When Beauty becomes the Beast

Spring is my favorite season as the plants start to come to life and the early blooming trees and shrubs are covered with their yearly mantle of beautiful blooms. Right now, the redbud, magnolia and ornamental pear trees are blooming in people's yards. Growing up, the Ornamental Pear was the king of the spring blooming trees with its beautiful white blooms, glossy green foliage during the summer and purple fall color. Unfortunately, this "King of Spring" eventually turned into an invasive nightmare and joined a group of landscape favorites that have turned into plant bullies. How could this happen? Let's find out!

The original Ornamental Pear was a variety that went by the name of "Bradford" and while it had beautiful, but smelly, flowers the tree was fruitless and most people willingly overlooked the slightly unpleasant flower smell for the blooms. As the trees grew it became apparent that the branching structure of the tree caused it to break under wind and other storms so the hybridizers began to develop varieties with stronger branch structures. This is where the issue began, pear trees need another variety of pear to cross pollinate to produce fruit. As new varieties appeared on the market and were planted the once fruitless Ornamental Pear started to develop small marble sized pears. These pears are simply a mess to clean up for homeowners but birds love them and will happily spread the seeds throughout the area. The pears that come up from the seeds have thorns and are prolific bloomers that start producing fruit at a young age which has further exacerbated the issue leading to the Ornamental Pear tree being listed as an invasive species in several states. This is unfortunately how the "King of Spring" turned from a spring beauty into a nightmare of a beast joining the bush honeysuckle, Japanese Barberry and burning bush as invasive species.



One of the best characteristics of the Ornamental Pear was that it was a tough tree that could withstand a variety of soil conditions and thrive. Those formerly desirable characteristics are making it a tough customer to control now that it has escaped. The best control will be found in a combination of cutting or mowing the small pear trees and treating the stumps or spraying small trees with a combination of glyphosate and triclopyr. If the pears are in a pasture setting burning can help set them back, however with their deep root system and

ability to sucker they will return with a vengeance so additional control measures will need to be made.

If you are looking for a spring blooming tree to include in your landscape, don't choose an Ornamental Pear. There are several alternatives that have far fewer issues and still provide the beautiful spring color. One of our native trees, the Redbud has beautiful purple blooms in the spring and is adapted to a variety of conditions. It can grow from seed however they are easy to remove and control. The flowering dogwood is another native small tree/large shrub that can be planted as an alternative. The beautiful white blooms transition to excellent foliage that turns red in the fall. Another option is the Flowering Crabapple that comes in a variety of bloom colors, sizes, shapes and leaf colors. This beautiful tree is disease resistant and with the amount of options you can find a Crabapple for almost any location. The one downside is some varieties do have small "apples" that can leave a mess. In our area a Magnolia tree is also an option for a replacement tree that has gorgeous blooms in the spring. There are several varieties that have different bloom colors depending on the size and shape of plant you want.

The Ornamental Pear is still a beautiful tree every spring and fall however its issues of being invasive coupled with a weak branching structure have made it a plant that I cannot recommend anyone plant. At this time, you can still purchase these trees because the state has not placed a ban on them. There are a variety of alternatives that are overall better trees. I won't say you have to remove the Ornamental Pear if you already have one planted but I would start to work on an exit strategy because sooner or later it will need to be removed. Unfortunately, these trees are still available for sale across the state but they should not be planted in our area.

Insect of the Week- Ticks

With the warm weather ticks have started to make their appearance across the area. Ticks serve as a food source for birds and other organisms in the environment but that doesn't mean we have to like them. Ticks typically reside in grassy areas near the soil and they will latch onto a host as they walk by. The males will feed sparingly and don't grow in size typically while the females will engorge. The females need a blood meal in order to produce eggs so they are more likely to attach to humans and pets. Ticks thrive in cool, wet weather (which we haven't had much of this spring) so it is likely that with the warmer and drier weather we may see a decrease in the tick population. To keep ticks from latching onto you, avoid unmanaged areas in the landscape or on walks, use repellants that contain 30% DEET and tuck your jeans into white socks so ticks are easier to see. When you get home remove clothes immediately and check for ticks. You can also put your clothes in the dryer on the highest setting to kill any ticks that might be hiding or attached. The lone star tick, American dog tick and the deer tick are the ones most commonly infesting people and dogs in the state. These three ticks are known as "three host ticks" as they will feed on three different hosts depending on where they are at in their life cycle which can last for up to two years.



Dog Tick

Lone Star Tick

Deer Tick

Weed of the Week- Henbit

Spring is in the air and with spring comes the purple carpet of Henbit growing in yards, ditches and fields. Henbit is a winter annual weed which means it actually sprouts in the fall, goes dormant over the winter and then blooms first thing in the spring. Once we have warm weather it dies until the fall when the seeds sprout again. This plant is a low growing member of the mint family with square stems, rounded to heart shaped leaves with lobed edges and pink to purple flowers produced at the top of the plant. Control of henbit is best done in the fall before it emerges or right after it comes up. Once the plant has come up in the spring and started to bloom its too late to spray. In the fall a pre-emergent can be applied in September (as long as you aren't seeding cool season grasses in the area) or you can spray the weeds in October with 2,4-D, Round-up, Trimec or similar products. Be sure to read the label for the application rate and time of application. For now, just enjoy the beautiful blooms that are beneficial for pollinators and keep your lawn as healthy as possible to help keep it weed free. Henbit can be invasive if not controlled however it is also beneficial to pollinators so feel free to let it grow if you wish.



Reminders-

- Check your houseplants for unwanted visitors.
- Plant new roses and remove mulch from existing roses.
- Water trees and shrubs that were planted in the last year or two if conditions are dry.
- It's still too early to apply most crabgrass preventers except Dimension and Barricade. Wait till April 15th or when the Redbud trees are blooming before applying most preventers.
- Wait to prune spring blooming bushes till after they bloom.

Video of the week: Easy ways to Water Trees

Trees can benefit from water during times of drought. An easy way to water trees is by installing a drip irrigation line. This segment covers the basics of installing your own system. Watch video here: <https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/water-wise-way-to-irrigate-trees>

Upcoming Events

- *April 5th at Noon- Growing to New Heights with Vertical Gardening*
Make the most of your garden by growing up, instead of out. Create vertical gardens to get your garden off of the ground, provide more space for plants, and expand your gardening area. Join Amanda Groleau, Frontier District Horticulture Extension Agent, as she shares the benefits of vertical gardening. Learn which fruits, vegetables, and flowers will grow best in a vertical garden and how to get started. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit this website: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>
- *April 17th at 7 pm- Gardening for Beginners and Beyond*
Gardening has become an extremely popular activity in the United States. Unfortunately for beginning gardeners there is quite a bit of conflicting information or unhelpful information available and it can be hard to sort through it. In this class not only will we talk about how to garden but I will also highlight some valuable resources. Join us to learn the basics of planning the garden, general care and to cover some basic problem solving for the issues that gardeners face. This class will be located at the Butler County Community/4-H Building at 206 N Griffith St. in El Dorado. Registration isn't required but is encouraged. Register here: <https://forms.gle/Qhwn8wpXPCvoh7Yy9> or call the office at (316) 321-9660.
- *April 22nd from 9-5 and April 23rd from noon to 5- Grow and Bloom in Butler Lawn and Garden show*
The Butler County Master Gardeners in an effort to promote horticultural activities and to provide educational opportunities are hosting our first Lawn and Garden Show in Butler County. The show will be held at the Butler County Community/4-H Building located at 206 N Griffith St, El Dorado, KS. This event will feature businesses from around the area in our vendor show along with expert speakers both from the area and across the state. Check out our website for more information: <https://www.butler.k-state.edu/horticulture/show/Butlerlawnandgardenshow.html>
- *May 3rd at Noon- Drought Tolerant Plants for a Challenging Kansas Landscape*
The Kansas climate throws numerous extremes at our landscape plants. The most common climate extreme is periods of drought, which are difficult for both plants and gardeners. Join Jason Graves, Central Kansas District Horticulture Extension Agent, and Matthew McKernan, Sedgwick County Horticulture Extension Agent, as they address our climate challenges and provide suggestions for drought tolerant plants that will make gardening easier. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/>