

Time for Bush Honeysuckle and Ornamental Pears to GO!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Anytime a plant, critter, insect, just any living thing, is moved out of its normal range and moved a substantial distance away, there are only three possible outcomes. The first is that the species will not survive - think banana trees outside in Kansas. The second outcome is that it will be suited to the new area it is moved to and will survive and fit right in. The third outcome is that it will be well adapted to the new region and in the absence of natural controls that were present in its native range, it proliferates to the point of being a problem.

The number of times that we have seen this happen is downright ridiculous and its often under the guise or mistaken notion, that "we are helping Mother Nature." Many times, these non-native invaders have been plants brought into an area for horticultural purposes or erosion control. We have two that we need to be dealing with right now before their spread becomes any worse than it already is. Those two are bush honeysuckle and ornamental pears, what we often call Bradford pear.

Because the fruit of both of these species is very attractive to many species of birds the birds eat the fruits (which contain seeds), the birds digest the pulp off these fruits and then excrete the seeds in a fertile mix that contains starter fertilizer! The Extension Service is not without blame with either of these species. Bush honeysuckles used to be sold and recommended by the Kansas Forest Service and Extension. I don't know how many versions of ornamental pears I recommended to be planted. But its time to start reversing this trend. We need to quit planting these species and start removing them from our landscape.

The first step is simple - stop planting ornamental pears. I will agree that they are strikingly beautiful in the spring. A tree full of crisp white flowers, early in the season when we are tired of a monochromatic landscape, is certainly attractive. Unfortunately, when those seeds are "planted" by the birds they start to develop thick groves, especially along fences, under power lines, anywhere that birds congregate and make a mess. These volunteer pear trees not only form thick groves, but they often seem to have lots of short thorn like branches. There are better choices for spring flowering trees. There are many flowering crabapples with all different sizes and shapes of trees available. Extension has a great bulletin that lists dozens of crabapple cultivars that are available in the trade.

The bush honeysuckle was popular because of its red berries and because it had few issues. But the birds plant these seeds everywhere and the volunteer bush honeysuckle has become so thick in some native forest areas that nothing else, including young native trees, can get established. We have many native shrubs that also provide good cover and food for birds. If you are interested in a list of these species, contact me at the Extension Office.

The final step is to remove these plants from your landscape. They both need to be cut off at ground level and then either treated with stump killer immediately or have the stumps ground out by a commercial stump grinding service. For treating the stumps of pears, the triclopyr based stump killers will work just fine. For bush honeysuckle you may have better control with concentrated glyphosate (Roundup). Apply directly to the freshly cut stump. Since many of these plants are growing in landscape settings I would avoid using Tordon RTU as this product moves readily in soil water and may be taken up by desirable plants close by. For information on identifying either of these plants, or recommended replacements, contact me at the Geary County Extension Office (785-238-4161) or by email at cotte@ksu.edu