

Upcoming Class! 3 Season Vegetable Garden:

Seed Saving April 16th 6:00 pm

Are you interested in saving seeds, but not sure where to start? UT Extension Washington County Agriculture Agent Adam Watson will introduce the basics of seed saving to gardeners and give you the knowledge to start saving seeds this season.

Zoom only, register: <https://tiny.utk.edu/seeds>



Invasive Callery Pears

Since early March you've probably been noticing trees blooming white all across the area. A good portion of what you are seeing is an invasive tree known as callery pears. The average person probably isn't knowingly familiar with callery pears by that name, but you might be familiar with at least one callery pear variety, the Bradford pear.

The Bradford pear, originally from China and Vietnam, was introduced and promoted beginning in the 1960's for several reasons. Bradford pears are reliable spring bloomers, they have few disease or insect problems and they are adaptable to a range of soil conditions including the urban environment.

However, some problems became evident too. When blooming they can offer a scent that isn't the most pleasant. Their physical structure proves to be very brittle with frequent limb breakage in ice and wind storms sometimes requiring removal of the tree. And generally speaking, they are not a long lived tree, rarely lasting more than 25 years. A more significant issue, their invasive potential, has only come to light in more recent times.

Bradford pears were always said to be sterile; this wasn't entirely accurate. Bradford pears in fact self-incompatible; they can't pollinate their own or other Bradford pears flowers, but they can be pollinated by other callery pear varieties. Enter the other callery pear varieties that were introduced intending to address some of the negatives found with Bradford pears. These newer varieties of callery pears suddenly offered the Bradford pears the opportunity to produce fruit and viable seeds. Birds or other animals eat these fruit and then spread the seeds across the landscape.



Non-planted callery pear growing near parking lot. Photo by Adam Watson

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The Trusty Trowel-April 2024

When you have non-native plants self-sowing in the environment you always have to ask if there is an ecological impact? In the case of callery pears many believe the answer is yes. One of the significant negatives associated with their spread is that their physical presence displaces native species that could be growing in our environment. So, why worry if we have a callery pear growing along the roadside or a native species? One thing to consider is the function that the species serve in the larger ecosystem.

A callery pears isn't host to many insect species. Many birds and other species rely heavily on insects for their diets. When callery pears are present in the environment they represent a space that is no longer functioning to provide resources to the other members of the ecosystem. As the presence of the callery pears increase and displace native species that do offer ecological support to other species, the environment becomes less suitable for native birds for instance. Counterintuitive, when we are literally increasing the number of trees across the landscape, but not all trees are created equal in regards to ecosystem function.

If you have callery pears in the landscape, I'd suggest replacing them with one of a number of spring blooming trees. Redbuds, Crabapples, Serviceberry, Flowering Cherries, Magnolias and others can be good alternatives to callery pears. If you have wild growing callery pears, I'd encourage removal; cutting them down and painting the stump with an herbicide to prevent resprouting is the general recommendation and [here is a publication outlining that](#). Do be cautious if you intend to bush hog or mow down the trees; some of the seedling trees can have large thorns that can puncture tires.

Timely Tips:

- **Protect Pollinators and other beneficial insects!** Using insecticides anytime when flowers are present should be done with caution. Always read and follow all label instructions in regards to protecting honey bees and other pollinators. Strategies such as applying insecticides at dusk, or mowing a lawn immediately before an insecticide application can help reduce the negative impacts of insecticide use.
- **Lawns:** Lawn fertilization must be completed by April 15th this includes weed and feed type products. Fertilizing after mid-April will cause disease problems during the summer; it's better to skip than apply late. Our next window for lawn fertilization is in the fall. Check out these publications for more info: [Selecting, Establishing and Maintaining the Fescues](#); [Lawn and Landscape Weed Control for Homeowners](#)
- **Should I skip the seeds from a dollar store?** Often repeated on the internet the idea that certain sources of garden seed, such as dollar stores, should be skipped. What I suspect is unknown to most of these commenters is that all vegetable seed that is sold interstate in the US must meet the requirements of [Federal Seed Act \(FSA\) and its related regulations](#). Additionally, seed sold in Tennessee must meet requirements of the [Tennessee's Seed laws](#). That means vegetable seed sold must meet a minimum standard in regards to correct variety identity, germination %, etc. What you might find negative about dollar store seeds are limited variety availability and fewer seeds per packet. Neither of which affects the ability of the seed to germinate, grow, and produce an acceptable yield.

For questions about your home and garden please feel free to contact me, Adam Watson, Agriculture Extension Agent watson@utk.edu.

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References made to commercial products or brand names is with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement is implied. Be sure to read and follow all pesticide label instructions.

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2024

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APRIL 1-14



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