

Forbidden Fruit

Written & photographed by Sean James

Remember those ladybugs that bite and cluster inside every autumn? They're called Asian Variable Coloured Ladybird Beetles. Entomologists said they didn't bite...then they got bitten! Those pests were brought in to battle Soy Aphids, another alien invader. The folks responsible obviously never heard the song "I know an old lady who swallowed a fly..."

Eco-issues are top of mind right now and it's incredible how quickly awareness of the environment and our effect on it is growing. It might be because some of the less-ornamental invaders including Common Reed (that pampas grass-like plant in our wetlands), Buckthorn and Dog-strangling Vine are becoming so obvious they just can't be ignored and are even making the news.

The issue of pollinator collapse is also front and centre, even making CNN prime time recently. Invasive plants deprive bees and other insects of food, making the problem even worse. Monarchs lay eggs on Dog-strangling Vine (closely related to milkweed) but it's toxic to them so the larvae die. Incidentally, to tie the invasive insect and invasive plant issue together, we've recently found out that Soy Aphid MUST overwinter on Buckthorn. All we needed to do was remove the non-native invasive Buckthorn in the first place to control the Soy Aphid, instead of releasing the invasive ladybug. (Oh what a tangled web...)

Choose Alternatives

Organizations such as the Ontario Invasive Plant Council work to educate us about better



▲ With beautiful natives such as Potentilla and Liatris (Gayfeather) that are perfect for clay soils, there's no need to plant invasive species.



▲ The amazing native Ruby Lace Honey Locust is an excellent alternative to Crimson King Maple.



▲ 'Grow Me Instead Ontario' is a useful resource for choosing great plants to grow instead of invasives. There is a version available online through ontarioinvasiveplants.ca.

alternatives to harmful alien plants. "Forbidden Fruit" is a concept that some of us are trying to avoid when it comes to invasive species. No one wants to be told what to plant and what not to plant. That doesn't mean we're not trying to guide people away from plants like Ornamental Pear and

Periwinkle and towards plants such as Pagoda Dogwood and Canada Wild Ginger.

Granted, there are native plants which try and take over such as Canada Anemone. For the purposes of clear definitions, we refer to those plants native plants as "aggressive." Plants not originally from here that take over, we refer to as "invasive." These invasive plants can spread like mad at the expense of our native species and reduce the food that our birds and butterflies need to survive. Some, such as Norway Maple, can completely take over our natural areas. Many invasives got here by accident but many were brought in as ornamentals.

Learning about alternatives to invasive plants is easy! Just Google "Grow Me Instead Ontario" to find out about plants to avoid, such as English Ivy and shrub honeysuckles and some of the great plants

to use instead. A great example would be replacing Crimson King Maple in designs with the fabulous Ruby Lace Honey Locust.

There are many invasive problems including insects such as Emerald Ash Borer and Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (definitely a mouthful!). Fish like Asian Carp are making inroads. Scientists are working on biocontrols and other non-chemical solutions. At least we can do our best not to use invasive plants and there are so many great natives to choose from. Don't stress about it. Gardening should still be fun. Just learn a bit every day and move forward. **NEV**

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