

An Ornamental Tree GONE WILD! The Callery Pear

By David Mow, Invasive Species Specialist | Photo Credit: David Mow

The Callery Pear tree is often referred to as a Bradford Pear and can be recognized by its white blossoms in early spring. Planted as an ornamental tree for decades by landscapers to beautify yards and line roadsides and driveways, it is still available in some nurseries today.

It is now considered invasive. By itself, the Callery Pear was bred to be a sterile tree, unable to reproduce on its own. We now know, it is possible for the tree to cross pollinate with other cultivars and produce fruit. Once the saplings from the cross-pollination are growing wild, they continue to produce fruit, seeds are spread by birds, the trees multiply, and become very difficult to control. Cross-pollinated Callery Pears may have thorns on them, unlike the original cultivar.




Even in poor soil conditions, it can form dense thickets that consume resources and shade out native plants, young trees, shrubs, and herbaceous wildflowers. It can quickly take over a field, roadside, prairie, or natural area. Because of this, there are several groups in Indiana trying to make it illegal to sell.


After it had been used a while in landscaping, it was discovered there are other reasons not to plant the tree. It has weak branching structure and often breaks during storms, causing property damage. New cultivars were produced to try and improve that, with little success. Some people also think that the blossoms of the tree smells like rotten fish.

Have these planted as an ornamental? It is recommended that you remove them. Though they may be beautiful in the spring, they are spreading an incredible number of seeds into other areas. The best control option for large trees is to cut them and immediately treat the stump with an herbicide. Small trees, under chest height, can have herbicide applied to the leaves. A basal bark treatment with an oil-based herbicide can also be used. Avoid treating in the spring when sap is flowing up towards the crown of the tree so that the herbicide will be taken into the roots to kill the tree permanently. If you want more information on treatment options, contact invasivesmorgancounty@gmail.com or jonesm@purdue.edu

There are several alternatives that you can replace it with. American Plum produces fruit that you can eat. Flowering Dogwood trees are native and have different varieties of colors. Several varieties of Hawthorn or Serviceberry flower at about the same time as Callery Pears do and produce an edible fruit, if you can beat the birds to it. The city of Martinsville now calls the Eastern Redbud its "official city tree" and it is a beautiful replacement, full of benefits to wildlife.

Join the Morgan County Native & Invasive Plant Partnership (MC NIPP) this month at a "Weed Wrangle". They will be pulling Garlic Mustard at Burkhart Creek Park on April 8th and Jimmy Nash Park on April 22nd from 9:00 to noon to improve the parks and increase native plant growth.





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