

Adapted Native Trees and Shrubs

by Ursula Nanna, Bell County Master Gardener

When considering what trees and shrubs to plant, there are numerous Texas natives from which to choose. However there are almost equally as many non-native adapted trees and shrubs to select. They do very well in our area and display a great degree of tolerance to our impressive temperature and moisture differences. Some of these trees and shrubs have been in Texas so long that we mistakenly think of them as natives.

As colonization and then western migration of pioneers took place, many settlers transported their favorite heirloom trees and shrubs. This is one reason why we see so many species appearing here that originated in the Mediterranean, Japan, China, France, Australia, and New Zealand. Many adapted species have been here since the 1700s and have acclimated very well to our soils and climate. Some have adapted so well that they have become nuisances to our delicate Texas native plant environment.

A nuisance tree or shrub would be defined as the seeds getting carried by wind, birds, and other environmental factors to our open field areas. As these nuisance adapted trees and shrubs grow and reproduce, they do crowd out our native plants. When our native plants, already depleted by urban sprawl, have less growing area, native wildlife attracted to our native trees and shrubs for shelter, food, and a place to raise their young also become depleted.

The list of nuisance trees and shrubs, though currently small, is growing every year. Some of them are: Nandina Domestica Bamboo; Waxleaf Ligustrum; Butterfly Bush; Russian Olive; and many Honeysuckles including Bush Honeysuckle.

The following is a list of non-native adapted trees and shrubs. It is by no means all inclusive as some may be arguably native, but the list will give us some idea of the large number of adapted trees and shrubs that have come to love Texas.

The trees would include on the list: Afghan Pine, American Elm, American Holly, American Hornbeam, America Plum, Aristocrat Pear, Austrian Pine, Bald Cypress, Big Tooth Maple, Bird of Paradise, Blue Spruce, Bottle Brush Tree, Bradford Pear, China Berry, Chinese Pistache, Chinese Tallow, Common Persimmon, Crab Apple, Crepe Myrtle, Deodor Cedar, Devil's Walking Stick, Fringe Tree, Ginkgo, Golden Lead Tree, Honey Locust, Italian Stone Pine, Japanese Black Pine, Japanese Magnolia, Japanese Persimmon, Jerusalem Thorn, Kentucky Coffee Tree, Lacebark Elm, Mexican Persimmon, Mexican Poinciana, Mulberry, Nellie R. Stevens Holly, Pinnacle Golden Rain Tree, Pink Lady Euonymus, Ponderosa Pine, Red Chokeberry, Retoma, Russian Olive, Senna, Sweet Bay, Sweet Golden Rain Tree, Sweet Gum, Vitex, and Wax Leaf Ligustrum.

The Shrubs on the list: Acuba Gold Dust, Anthony Waterer Spirea, Balloon Flower, Blue Mist, Bowles Wall Flower, Brazillian Rock Rose, Brazillian Verbena, Burford Holly, Bush Honeysuckle, Cast Iron Plant, Century Plant Agave, Chinese Loropetulum, Chinese Photinia, Chinese Private, Dwarf Pomegranate, Indian Hawthorn, Indigo Spires, Italian Jasmine, Japanese Barberry, Japanese Boxwood, Japanese Yew, Lavender, Miniature Weeping Crepe Myrtle, Moi Grande Hibiscus, Nandina, Primrose Jasmine, Pyracantha, Rose Mallow, Rose of Sharon/Althea, Rosemary, Sandankwa Viburnum, Verbena, Wedelia.

It is surprising to see some of these, isn't it? Most of the listed trees and shrubs are quite familiar and beautiful. We think of them as natives sometimes as they are so popular and widespread. The issue becomes whether the specimen is a nuisance and invasive or not, and if they are worth planting and depriving us of the beauty of the true native species.