

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER  
Tip of the Week  
By Beverly Wickersham  
“Beware of Invasive Plants”

“In Georgia, the legend says  
That you must close your windows  
At night to keep it out of the house.  
The glass is tinged with green even so...”  
From the poem “Kudzu” by James Dickey

What exactly is an “invasive” plant?

For the naturalist, a plant is invasive when it tends to escape cultivation after being introduced into an area where it is not native. It then colonizes, eventually forming monoculture plantings that aggressively exclude other species or, more often, crowds other species to the point of choking them off from light or resources.

Kudzu, a native plant of Japan, was first seen in America at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. The beautiful ornamental plant with its large leaves and sweet smelling flowers was in demand by gardeners. It was also recommended for erosion control and as a forage plant for livestock. This “miracle vine” which can grow as much as a foot per day soon began to crowd out native species. By 1953 the U. S. Government stopped advocating its use. However, Kudzu now covers over seven million acres of the Southeastern United States and has had a significant negative impact on valuable forests and native plants.

For the gardener, an “invasive” plant is one that quickly “takes over” the garden spot. It crowds out other plants in the area and requires extensive effort to keep it under control. English Ivy and Vinca are considered invasive because they quickly invade areas and choke out other plants.

The problem for gardeners is that many “invasive” plants are favored by butterflies, birds or other wildlife. Additionally, these plants are recommended in highly-regarded publications for attracting birds, butterflies, dragonflies, or other species to your backyard. For example, Pyracantha is frequently recommended for its attraction to several bird species, especially the Cedar Waxwings who seek it out during their fall migration. Please consider non-invasive alternatives to the invasive plants common to our Central Texas region. For more information check out [www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org) or try [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)

INVASIVE

Chinese Tallow  
Mimosa  
Japanese Honeysuckle  
Ligustrum, Wax Leaf  
Nandina (Berrying varieties)  
Photinia, Chinese  
Pyracantha  
English Ivy  
Wisteria

NON-INVASIVE ALTERNATIVES

Lacey oak, Texas Red Oak  
Desert Willow  
Coral Honeysuckle  
Texas Sage, Barbados Cherry  
Non-berrying Nandinas, Texas Sage  
Evergreen Sumac  
Evergreen Yaupon  
Leadwort Plumbago, Mountain Pea  
Passion Vine

