



# Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

## Butterfly Bush

*Buddleja davidii* Franch.



Photo: Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)

### Background:

This shrub is also known as orange-eye butterfly bush and summer lilac. It was brought to the U.S. in the early 1900s as an ornamental shrub from its native range in China.

### Range:

Butterfly bush is found through southern New England, the Mid-Atlantic states south to Florida, and across the southern portion of the U.S. to California and even Washington.

### Description:

This perennial woody shrub has a weeping form that can grow anywhere from three to 12 feet in height, with roughly the same width. Opposite, lance-shaped grey-green leaves up to 10 inches in length grow on long arching stems.

Small fragrant pinkish-purple purple flowers, typically with an orange center, grow in long spikes that are eight to 18 inches in length. The flower clusters are so profuse that the branches may arch even further. Flowers bloom from May to August and are attractive to butterflies.

### Habitat:

Butterfly bush likes well-drained, average soil. They can thrive in dry conditions once established. They frequently colonize poor, disturbed soils that many native plants cannot grow in, like along roads, train tracks and polluted sites, but can also invade stream and river banks and forest edges.

### Biology and Spread:

This plant produces abundant seeds that are easily dispersed by the wind (*see below*).



Photo: Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)

### Ecological Threat:

Because this shrub has been planted so extensively, it commonly escapes into a variety of habitats where it displaces native plants.



Photo: Leslie Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut, [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org)

## How to Control this Species:

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### Manual

Hand pick seedlings or dig out where possible. Large shrubs may be difficult to remove manually.

### Chemical

Cut plants and treat stumps with a systemic herbicide like triclopyr or glyphosate. Be sure to follow the label and all state herbicide requirements.

## Look-A-Likes:

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There are over 100 species of *Buddleja* worldwide and additional cultivars are being developed. Not all will necessarily become invasive. *Buddleja* may also be confused with non-native lilacs.



Photo: Forest & Kim Starr,  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)



Photo: Dow Gardens Archive,  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## Native Alternatives:

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There are a variety of native shrubs and wildflowers that have showy flowers that attract butterflies and other pollinators including: Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*), Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) and New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*).



Photo: Jessica Sprajcar,  
DCNR

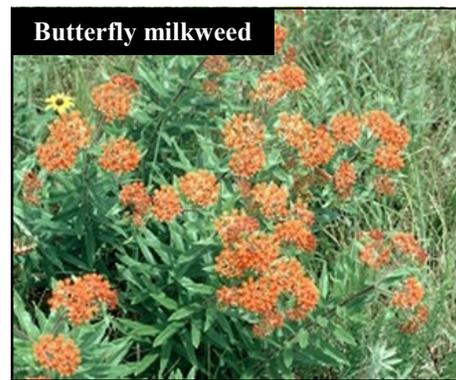


Photo: John Byrd, Mississippi State U.,  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)



Photo: Karan Rawlins, U. of Georgia,  
[www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## References:

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USDA Forest Service Weed of the Week factsheet:

[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive\\_plants/weeds/butterfly\\_bush.pdf](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/butterfly_bush.pdf)

Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers:

[http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/butterfly\\_bush.htm](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/butterfly_bush.htm)

Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health:

<http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=11608>

## For More Information:

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Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:

[http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip\\_field\\_guide.pdf](http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf)