

## **Native Alternatives to Non-Native Pest Plants**

Steve Sanchez–Hughes, Good, O’Leary & Ryan, Inc.

***Ailanthus altissima***, Tree-of-heaven- Prolific seed production and a wonderful winged dispersal system helped this tree spread into many urban situations. Not offered in the trade anymore and I doubt planted much on purpose.

Alternative:

***Juglans nigra***, Black Walnut–The texture of Black Walnut closely mimics that of the Tree-of-heaven and they grow to roughly the same size. The fruit of Black Walnut, however, may be considered a nuisance to some.

***Albizia julibrissin***, Mimosa- Prolific self-seeder along woodland edges

Alternatives:

***Amorpha fruticosa***, Leadplant- This plant is native throughout the eastern United States. It usually is found along large streams and rivers where it often flooded. It has a lacy foliage much like mimosa, however its size is much smaller, only reaching 15-25’. The small purple flowers in late spring are not as showy as mimosa but are interesting in their own right.

***Pinckneya pubens***, Georgia Feverbark Tree–If you like mimosa as a pink summer flowering tree, look no further than this tree. Found in the wetlands of our coastal plain, Georgia Feverbark has unique Poinsettia-like pink bracts that stick around for days after the flower finishes.

***Robinia hispida***, Rose-acacia Locust–This nice spring flowering small tree or large shrub is a relative of mimosa. It has pinnate leaves and pink blooms, but it also has the tendency to sucker.

***Firmiana simplex***, Chinese Parasol Tree–Self-seeder, worse in sandy soils such as those found around Natchez, MS, where this plant is quite the weed.

Alternative:

***Magnolia macrophylla***, Bigleaf Magnolia - offers this look and has the added attraction of large white flowers. There is no more tropical-looking tree in our piedmont woods than this guy.

***Ligustrum lucidum***, Glossy Privet - this tree produces abundant black fruit which are widely disseminated by birds. It’s a bigger problem in the coastal plain.

Alternative:

***Osmanthus americanus***, Devilwood, this native evergreen tree from the coastal plain has glossy green leaves and a similar habit to Glossy Privet.

***Melia azederach***, Chinaberry- Not much planted anymore, the seeds of this invasive exotic are spread far by birds.

Alternative:

***Aralia spinosa***, Devil's Walking Stick –The unusual texture of the leaves of Chinaberry can be closer mimicked by those of the Devil's Walking Stick. This plant also has showy flowers and fruit similar to Chinaberry.

***Paulownia tomentosa***, Royal Princess Tree- Once sold for its attractive lavender flowers, large leaves, and fast growth, this tree is rarely sold by local nurseries. It has become extremely weedy, popping up in urban sidewalk cracks as well as the sacred forest edges in the Appalachians.

Alternative:

***Catalpa bignonioides***, Southern Catalpa– this native tree originally found from the Georgia coastal plain, is a relative of the Royal Princess Tree. It has large leaves and showy white flowers.

***Pyrus calleryana*** 'Bradford', Bradford Pear- Every time I think that the world knows the problems of this tree, I meet another person extolling its virtues. Not only is it weak-wooded, but, it's also beginning to pop up in urban woods where the seeds are deposited by birds.

Alternatives:

***Crataegus viridis*** 'Winter King', Winter King Hawthorn– This medium-size flowering tree offers interest year-round. The white flowers are very similar to those of Bradford Pear except that they emerge with the leaves. From mid fall throughout winter the red fruit adorn the boughs. As if that were not enough, the muscle-like orange bark is an added feature. Two other good hawthorns for this area are *Crataegus phaenopyrum*, Washington hawthorn and *C. spathulata*, Littlehip Hawthorn.

***Amelanchier arborea***, Serviceberry–This early blooming native emerges on the tail end of the Bradford bloom. The white flowers are followed by late-spring

red fruit. These edible fruit would be showing except the birds rarely allow them to stay on the tree for long.

***Amelanchier x grandiflora*** 'Autumn Brilliance' is the most common cultivar found in the trade. It is said to have good fall color but I've never witnessed anything spectacular.

***Sapium sebiferum***, Chinese Tallow Tree- This is the most noxious tree in the deep south swamps. It is more salt tolerant than Bald Cypress and can therefore extend its range beyond that tree. The abundant white fruit are relished by doves and other birds.

Alternative:

***Oxydendrum arboreum***, Sourwood– Sourwood has the red fall color, summer flowers, and mildly showy white fruit just like Tallow Tree, but it's a long-lived native tree

***Berberis thunbergii*** 'Atropurpurea', Purpleleaf Barberry –Minor seeding of this species into urban woods.

Alternatives:

***Physocarpus opulifolius*** 'Diablo'–Ninebark is found from the rocky slopes of North Georgia to the gravel riverbanks of Michigan. This new cultivar of Ninebark holds its dark purple color throughout the growing season. It's a bit larger than barberry, 5-8' hgt., but just as purple.

***Diervilla sessilifolia***, Southern Bush Honeysuckle– this small deciduous native is borrowed from our mountain counties. Although the foliage is green, the new growth emerges as a beautiful copper color when grown in a sunny location. Adding to the charm are small clusters of yellow flowers throughout the summer.

***Buddleia davidii***, Butterfly Bush- Beginning to appear along roadsides in the cooler parts of the state.

***Aesculus parviflora***, Bottlebrush Buckeye– one of our finest native flowering shrubs is also a good butterfly attractor. Don't overlook it for fall color. It produces a striking yellow display.

***Cephalanthus occidentalis***, Buttonbush—If your goal is to attract butterflies, this is the shrub for you. This summer bloomer will attract every butterfly within a mile radius, and maybe a few bees also.

***Clerodendron bungei***, Harlequin Glory bower- Grown for its attractive flowers, this runner spreads very quickly into woodlands.

Alternatives:

***Hydrangea arborescens*** ‘Annabelle’— If you want a small shrub with a showy flower display in late spring few natives can beat Annabelle Hydrangea. If you are desiring a cultivar less ostentatious, try other selections of Mtn. Hydrangea such as ‘Hills of Snow’ and ‘Bounty’.

***Rhododendron prunifolium***, Plumleaf Azalea—If it’s the summer flowering that attracted you to Glory bower, you may want to try Plumleaf Azalea or the pink hybrid ‘Summer Lyric’.

***Cytisus scoparius***, Scotch Broom- Bigger problem on the West Coast but some seeding does occur in the east.

Alternatives:

***Hypericum densiflorum*** ‘Creels Gold Star’- Are you looking for a fine textured shrub with yellow flowers? Scotch Broom isn’t your answer, Bushy St. Johns wort is. This species is found most often in our mountain counties, but occasionally it is found in the Coastal Plain. The cultivar ‘Creel’s Gold Star’ is an exciting new compact selection that adds a much-needed small shrub to our native palette.

***Eleagnus pungens***, Thorny Eleagnus, Thorny Olive- Invading into almost all urban woodlands, this species produces abundant seeds relished by birds.

Alternatives:

***Illicium parviflorum***, Ocala Anise—If a medium textured large evergreen shrub is desired look no further than Ocala Anise. It can take sun or shade and all but the wettest soils. Although native only to 5 counties in central Florida, it is remarkable hardy in Atlanta.

***Myrica heterophylla***, Swamp Candleberry— This relative of wax myrtle is an attractive shrub capable of handling sun or shade and can take the wettest conditions. Its foliage can become a little tattered in the harshest winters, but it

recovers quickly in spring. It is rarely found in the piedmont, being much more at home in the wetlands of the coastal plain.

***Eleagnus umbellata***, Autumn Olive- Another *Elaeagnus* escaped into woods by birds. The large red fruit are also transported by small mammals.

Alternatives:

***Calycanthus floridus***, Sweetshrub –If you prefer Autumn Olive for its sweet spring bloom, try Sweetshrub. Native to the Atlanta region, but you may wish to make your selection when the plant is in bloom since certain individuals are more fragrant than others.

***Croton alabamensis***, Alabama Croton - I find that the leaves of Alabama Croton closely resemble those of Autumn Olive. The silver undersides are a striking detail. Sporadic orange fall color over an extended time is one of its subtle attributes

***Euonymus alatus***, Burning Bush- Beginning to see this species seed out in the cooler parts of the State.

Alternatives:

***Fothergilla major***, 'Mt. Airy, Mt. Airy Fothergilla– This shrub is one of our best selections for fall color with its brilliant display of orange.

***Vaccinium corymbosum***, Highbush Blueberry –I don't know why more Blueberry selections aren't made for their ornamental qualities. Many cultivars have striking red fall color.

***Ilex crenata***, Japanese Holly- I'm surprised that this species isn't listed on more list of noxious exotics. I find specimens growing in almost all urban woods.

Alternative:

***Ilex glabra***, Inkberry – This shrub from our coastal plain offers us a good dense Evergreen alternative to the Japanese cultivars. We find the best cultivars are 'Nigra', 'Densa', 'Compacta', and 'Shamrock'. They all stay denser in full sun.

***Ligustrum sinense***, Chinese Privet- Enemy number one: I'm sure that this plant covers far more acreage and displaces far more species than Kudzu ever did. To add insult to injury, the University of Georgia reveres this plant as the stadium 'hedges', occasionally taking cuttings and selling them as a shrub to be worshipped.

Alternatives:

***Myrica cerifera***, Wax myrtle– If you are looking for a tough evergreen shrub plant a wax myrtle. It is a coastal plain native that is sometimes found wandering into the piedmont. Its biggest drawback is its susceptibility to breakage in ice storms, but this can be remedied by planting one of the many compact cultivars. Good ones include 'Don's Dwarf', 'Fairfax' & 'Jamaica Road'.

***Cyrilla racemiflora***, Titi– This is THE toughest native shrub. Once again found in the coastal plain but occasionally crossing the border into the piedmont, Titi is naturally found growing in saturated ground. However, it is right at home if planted in dry conditions. Sun or shade, it doesn't matter. The added bonus is the profusion of white tassel flowers which drape the plant in June and July. More evergreen in shaded conditions and semi-evergreen in sunny locations.

***Ligustrum sinense*** 'Variegata', Variegated Chinese Privet- This variegated selection is probably worse than the species because people are more likely to purchase this plant for its unique color, not realizing that it self-seeds back to the invasive parent.

Alternative:

***Juniperus virginiana*** 'Grey Owl'– OK, this was a hard one to find a native alternative for. I don't know of any white variegated native shrubs. The blue-gray color of Grey Owl Cedar, however, comes quite close to the effect of Variegated Privet. Unlike its parent, Eastern Red Cedar, this is a spreading shrub, not an upright tree. Some have said it is a cross with Chinese Juniper.

***Lonicera maackii***, Amur Honeysuckle- Although not planted much anymore, this species is another one relished by birds and spread through urban woods.

Alternative:

***Ilex verticillata***, Winterberry –The berries of Amur honeysuckle are beautiful, but, we have it beat with Winterberry. I can't think of a shrub, native or foreign, that has a more striking winter berry display. 'Winter Red' and the diminutive 'Red Sprite' are my two favorite selections. Don't forget the male pollinators, 'Southern Gentleman', and 'Jim Dandy' respectively.

***Mahonia bealei***, Leatherleaf Mahonia- I don't think enough people know how often this plant seeds into urban woods.

Alternatives:

***Viburnum nudum***, Possumhaw Viburnum—Possibly the bluest berries of any native shrub can be found on this shrub. The amazing thing about them is they turn bright pink before the blue stage.

***Viburnum bracteatum*** 'Emerald Lustre'— Emerald Lustre Viburnum—this selection has wonderful clusters of blue berries in the fall. The glossy sheen just makes them stand out more.

***Callicarpa americana***, American Beautyberry— Although not a blueberry, Beautyberry has the most exquisite purple berries that it doesn't even matter that the plant is deciduous.

***Nandina domestica***, Nandina- The red berries are irresistible to birds which carry them into our urban woods.

Alternatives:

***Xanthorhiza simplicissima***, Yellowroot— If you like the small cultivar Nandinas as a groundcover, try using Yellowroot instead. The texture is almost identical. Instead of winter color you will get good fall color. The one advantage of yellowroot is it is wet loving. One disadvantage is it is deciduous.

***Agarista populifolia***, Florida Leucothoe— I think that this plant most closely replicates the graceful look of Nandina. It would have to be pruned however to keep it in the Nandina range of 4-8' hgt. This Florida native, if left to its own, would eventually grow into a 10-15' high tree. A new dwarf cultivar, 'Leprechaun', is on the market and may resolve some of the size issue.

***Leucothoe axillaris***, Coastal Leucothoe— This is one of my favorite unsung evergreen shrubs native to Georgia. It is a coastal denizen but occasionally crosses over into the piedmont. It doesn't get leaf spot as bad as Drooping Leucothoe (*Leucothoe fontanesiana*) and it stays low like many of the Nandina cultivars. I am particularly fond of the cultivar 'Jenkins' which is a little bit larger than the species and shows good resistance to leaf spot.

***Rosa multiflora***, Multiflora Rose- Once used by DOT for slope stabilization, this plant has run amuck, especially in states to the north of Georgia.

Alternative:

***Itea virginica***, Virginia Sweetspire– This is one of our toughest shrubs and one of the first butterfly attractors in late spring. The long white tassels are attractive but the real show comes in fall when the plants turn various shades of red and maroon. Good cultivars include ‘Henry’s Garnet’, ‘Little Henry’, ‘Merlot’, and ‘Sarah’s Eve’.

***Akebia quinata***, Five-leaf Akebia- This seemingly dainty vine spreads by vegetative growth as well as by seed. Don’t be fooled.

Alternative:

***Gelsemium sempervirens***, Carolina Jessamine– If you desire an evergreen twining vine, you can’t do much better than this vine. The glossy disease resistant foliage is covered in March by fragrant yellow blooms. I find the fragrance akin to a sweet talcum powder.

***Clematis terniflora***, Sweet Autumn Clematis– This plant has taken over so many acres of woods that many think they are looking at the native plant when actually it is this noxious invasive.

Alternative:

***Clematis virginiana***, Virgin’s Bower– This native cousin of Sweet Autumn Clematis may not be as profuse a bloomer, but it’s a lot more controllable.

***Euonymus fortunei*** ‘Coloratus’, Creeping Wintercreeper- On this list I would consider this one of the lesser invasive species. But it is seen occasionally in urban woods.

Alternative:

***Antennaria plantaginifolia***– Southern Pussytoes- this may be a stretch, but if you desire an evergreen groundcover for dry conditions, try the southern Pussytoes. It doesn’t spread fast, but in the end it will be a solid groundcover.

***Hedera helix***, English Ivy– because of its seemingly slow growth, this plant is under a lot of peoples radar as a noxious invasive. Its main mode of transportation is vegetative growth, but mature plants are everywhere dropping more seeds in the woods. Adding to the difficulty of removing this plant from the trade is finding adequate substitutes.



Alternatives:

***Pachysandra procumbens***, Allegheny Spurge— If you need a native evergreen groundcover, there is none I would recommend more highly than Allegheny Spurge. Another slow spreader, this groundcover can take dry or moist soils.

***Bignonia capreolata***, Crossvine— If you appreciate the ability of English Ivy to be an evergreen vine that will slowly climb up masonry walls, try Crossvine on your next project. This native vine not only climbs walls, but the foliage turns an attractive purple shade in winter and can be covered in orange-red blooms in spring.

***Houttuynia cordata*** 'Chameleon', Chameleon Plant— This lover of wet soils can spread very rapidly. The desirable trait of the variegated foliage disappears in the shade.

Alternatives:

***Hexastylus shuttleworthii* var. *harperi***, Harper's Wild Ginger- Not as aggressive as Chameleon Plant, Harper's Wild Ginger is a great groundcover for moist areas. It spreads slowly, but surely. If you have patience, you will be rewarded by this one.

***Asarum canadense***, Wild Ginger—Although not evergreen, this groundcover spreads nicely in good soil and can make a nice green carpet.

***Liriope muscari***, Liriope, Monkey grass— This very popular groundcover has been found to seed out in urban environments.

Alternative:

***Carex plantaginea***, Plantain-leaved Sedge— I'm surprised I don't see this plant used more. It is an evergreen sedge with attractive pleated leaves. It doesn't spread but the clump can get up to 18" wide. It won't tolerate much sun and does appreciate ample moisture, two factors that somewhat limit its replacement of Liriope. Still, if both of those requests are provided, this plant will not disappoint you.

***Sisyrinchium angustifolium***, Blue-eyed Grass— I don't know which of this native's attributes I appreciate more: evergreen foliage or the profusion of blue flowers produced in spring. This perennial is not a grass, but a member of the Iris family. A new cultivar, 'Suwanee', is getting much notice.

***Lonicera japonica***, Japanese Honeysuckle– Not many people plant this anymore, but the damage is done. Probably our second most invasive vine.

Alternative:

***Lonicera sempervirens***, Coral Honeysuckle– With this well-tempered, beautiful vine around, why would anybody ever plant Japanese Honeysuckle. The long blooming season plus the striking red color makes this vine unique.

***Lygodium japonicum***, Japanese Climbing Fern– a climbing fern found throughout the urban environment.

Alternative:

***Lygodium palmatum***, American Climbing Fern– A little known and rare native, American Climbing Fern offers the same texture as the Japanese counterpart, but with a less aggressive tendency.

***Pueraria lobata***, Kudzu– Need I say anything about this beast? I don't think anyone is intentionally planting it anymore.

Alternative:

***Aristolochia macrophylla***, Dutchman's Pipe–I don't know why anyone would still be planting Kudzu, but, if someone desires a coarse textured vine I would lead them to Dutchman's Pipe. Although it may grow somewhat aggressively in its mountain home, this vine is quite well behaved in the piedmont.

***Vinca major***, Largeleaf Periwinkle– mildly aggressive and typically just spreading from the landscape vegetatively

Alternatives:

***Decumaria barbara***, Climbing Hydrangea–Although not ever green, this native vine bears a striking resemblance to *Vinca major*. Although this vine tends to want to climb, it can be trained as a groundcover. I know, this one is a stretch.

***Vinca minor***, Common Periwinkle– more aggressive than *Vinca major*, this plant is a bigger problem further north.

Alternative:

***Mitchella repens***, Partridgeberry—This diminutive groundcover looks much like a tiny *Vinca minor*. It is not very aggressive and may need some weeding help to stay competitive, but it is well worth growing where shady conditions exist.

***Wisteria sinensis***, Chinese Wisteria— Chinese Wisteria along with Kudzu and Japanese Honeysuckle have been the three major attackers of southern woods. This one spreads both vegetatively and by seed.

Alternative:

***Wisteria frutescens***, American Wisteria - In recent years this native has really grown in popularity. This well behaved vine can even be grown up a tree with the fear of strangling the host. American Wisteria blooms after the leaves emerge and has an attractive yellow fall color. It is naturally found in moist soils of the coastal plain but it is also occasionally found in the piedmont.

***Imperata cylindrica***, Cogon Grass- Cogon Grass is a serious problem in the coastal plain around the Mobile area. Less so in the piedmont.

Alternative:

***Schizachyrium scoparium***, Little Bluestem – Little Bluestem has just recently been recognized for its ornamental qualities with the introduction of a few new cultivars. My favorite by far is ‘The Blues’ with its striking gray blue color.

***Miscanthus sinensis***, Maiden Grass, Chinese Silvergrass- we are starting to see signs of this plant seeding out along roadsides to the north of Atlanta. There is much debate on this plant since so many have found uses for the mountain of cultivars produced.

Alternative:

***Panicum virgatum***, Switch Grass— Again, with the recent introduction of many improved cultivars, Switch Grass has really grown in popularity. It is most naturally occurring in wet areas of the coastal plain but it is not finicky in the landscape. ‘Heavy Metal’ an upright cultivar with blue-green foliage and ‘Hanse Herms’ with remarkings and a spreading habit are two of my favorite selections.

***Tripsicum dactyloides***, Eastern Gama grass— This is a large coarse-textured grass that is very tolerant of wet areas. Its flowers are nothing to write home about. This one is grown for the foliage effect.

***Pennisetum alopecuroides***, Fountain Grass— Certain cultivars, such as ‘Moudry’, are prolific self-seeders.

Alternative:

***Muhlenbergia capillaris***, Pink Muhly Grass—You have not been paying attention if you missed the explosion of interest over this native grass of the coastal plain in the past few years. A mass of this plant in bloom is unrivaled for show. When backlit, Muhly Grass will stop you in your tracks. There has been some debate that the plant in the trade is actually ***Muhlenbergia capillaris* var. *fillipes***, the form found in the swales of coastal dunes.

***Phyllostachys spp.***, Running Bamboo and ***Pseudosasa japonica***, Arrow Bamboo— Fortunately these plants almost never spread by sexual means. Their invasive status is mainly brought about by poor stewardship of planted material and a general ignorance of their growing patterns.

Alternative:

***Arundinaria gigantea***, Switch Cane, American Bamboo—Our native bamboo has been too long overlooked. It has never achieved the status of the Asian species because of its tendency to be semi-evergreen and to hold on to the brown leaves from the previous season. With a little bit of pruning and a removal of tardy leaves and stems, this bamboo can be made into a striking feature of any garden. It is a runner, but much less so than the Asian species.