



# PLANTS TO PASS UP

Some species commonly planted in the past are no-no's today, because of deleterious environmental effects. Consider replacing them with a few beneficial plants listed here.

BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON

Mimi Elmore is the first to admit how easy it is to fall in love with pretty blossoms at garden centers. After tending a water-guzzling garden at her previous home, she committed to xeriscaping her Lyons landscape with only drought-tolerant plants that also benefited wildlife. Over time, she honed in on native plants because they fulfilled both her requirements.

But a few purple catmint flowers caught her eye at the nursery and ended up in her yard. The non-native catmints stayed, "mainly because they're early bloomers and a good nectar source for bees," Elmore says. But the plants eventually began taking over her garden, and she pulls about 50 each spring to keep it in check.

Not all of us are as dedicated as Elmore when it comes to keeping a good balance in our gardens. Without due diligence, some plants can spread to the point of bullying other vegetation and creating unhealthy monocultures.

Though dozens of the most detrimental invasive plants are unlawful to sell in Colorado, many of those same species thrive in local gardens, likely planted decades ago by unwitting gardeners.

In Boulder County alone, 336 invasive plants have been reported, including common soapwort, Chinese clematis, dame's rocket and tamarisk, among others. Because native insects haven't evolved to utilize non-native plants, ornamentals that run amok can have a negative impact on wildlife. For example, most terrestrial birds feed their young solely on insects, while caterpillars of many butterfly species use only one type of native plant for food.

Here's a list of deleterious plants, along with suggested replacements to help fill your patch with eco-friendlier vegetation. If these offenders grow in your yard consider removing or pruning them and pulling any runners. For information about noxious weeds in Colorado, visit [www.cwma.org/noxweeds](http://www.cwma.org/noxweeds).

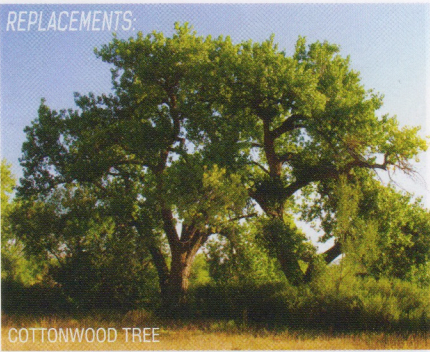


## OFFENDER: SIBERIAN ELM (*ULMUS PUMILA*)

Gardeners plant these deciduous trees because they grow fast and provide good shade in summer. "But here in Lyons, they're destroying yards and open spaces," says Elmore, a landscape

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; EXCEPT SIBERIAN ELM: MATT LAVIN; GAMBEL OAK: DAVE POWELL/BUGWOOD.ORG

REPLACEMENTS:



COTTONWOOD TREE



GAMBEL OAK



LINDEN TREE FLOWERS

designer who pulls thousands of saplings from yards every year. "They grow through sidewalks, holes in roads and spaces around signposts. They suck up water and give virtually nothing back to the environment."

REPLACEMENTS:

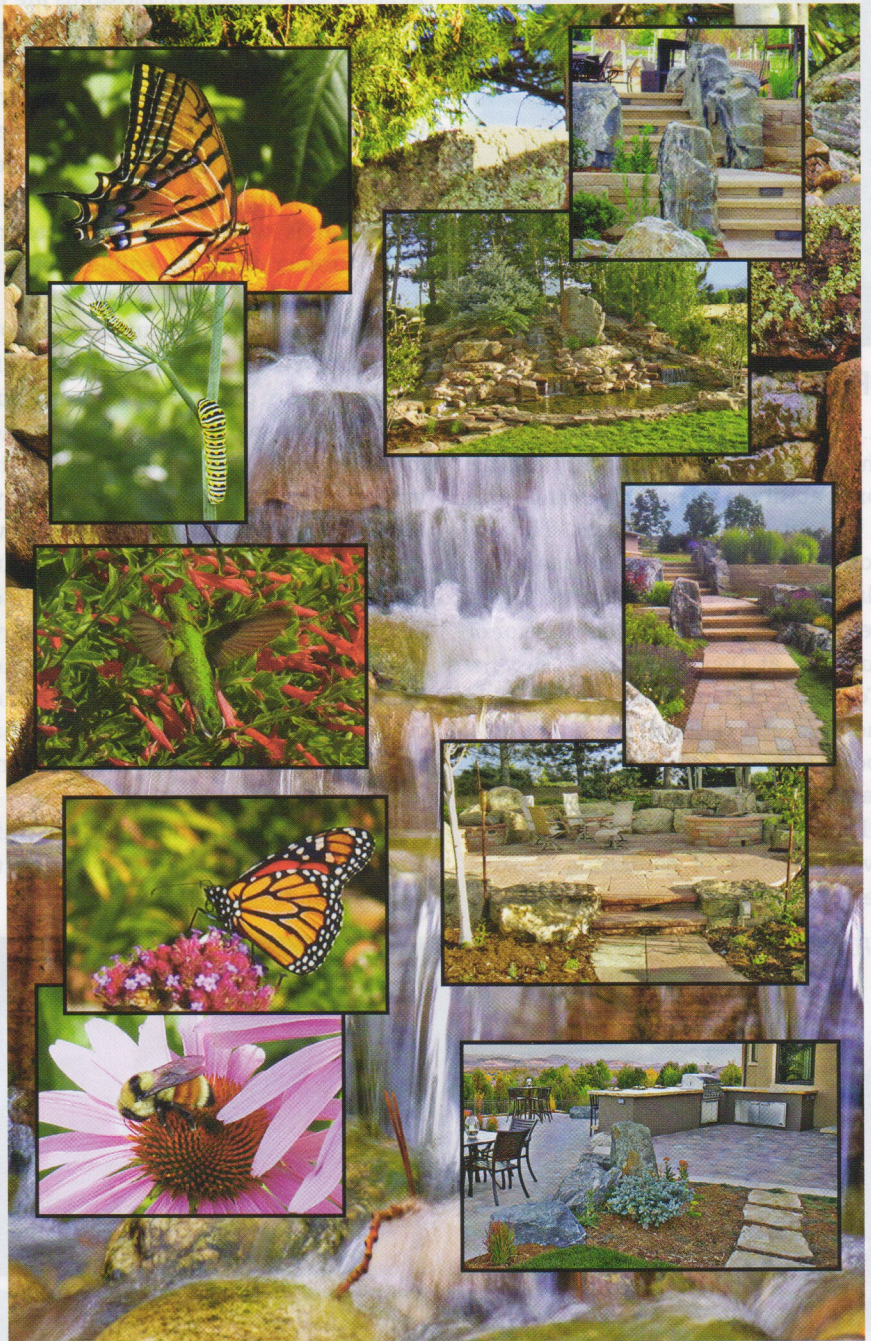
Cottonwood trees cast excellent summer shade. They're also vital to the prairie ecosystem, providing forage and cover for animals. Cottonwood is a host plant to the western sphinx moth and is used by Apache cicadas and southwestern tent caterpillars, providing a spring feast for nesting birds. Another option is the linden tree, a virtual bee magnet.

In his book *Bringing Nature Home*, wildlife ecologist Doug Tallamy identifies the Redmond linden as one of the top wildlife-supporting trees. Other choices for Boulder County include Gambel oak and wild plum. The Gambel oak is one Panayoti Kelaidis of Denver Botanic Gardens highly recommends: "I love it, though many homeowners find it scruffy and unattractive."

# BRING NATURE HOME

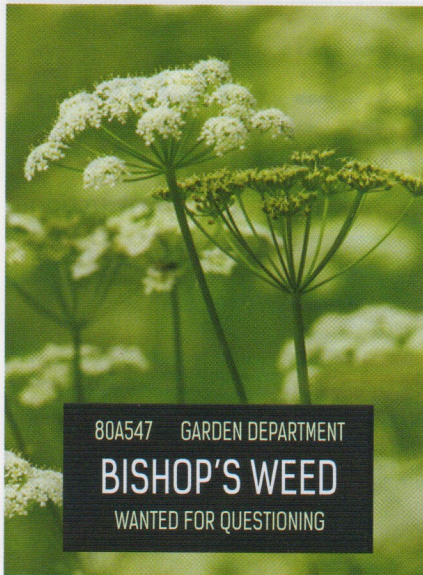
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80A547 GARDEN DEPARTMENT  
**BISHOP'S WEED**  
 WANTED FOR QUESTIONING

**OFFENDER: BISHOP'S WEED**  
 (AEGOPODIUM PODAGRARIA)

This ground cover is typically chosen for its ability to tolerate sun, shade and a variety of soil conditions. Though not legally classified as invasive, the plant "should be discouraged," says Kelaidis, senior curator and director of outreach at Denver Botanic Gardens. "To get rid of it, make sure your soil is moist so you can pull out the whole root," Elmore says. "Even so, you'll have to dig down to make sure they're all out." It may take several sessions over a couple of gardening seasons before the rhizomes peter out.

**REPLACEMENTS:**



FRENCH LAVENDER



VIRGINIA CREEPER



PLUMBAGO



BLACK-EYED SUSAN



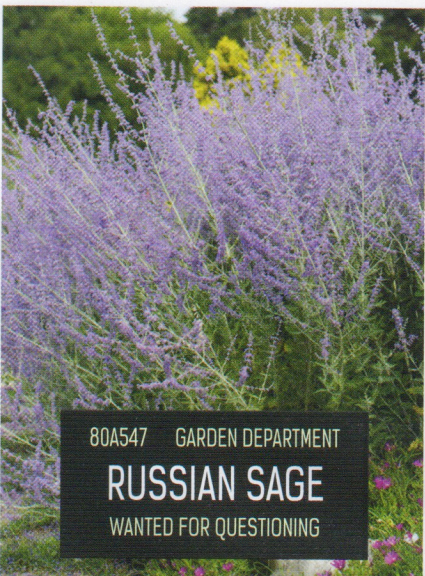
MILKWEED

**REPLACEMENTS:**

Wild geranium (found at a few specialty nurseries) and native columbines do well in sunlight and shade. But, "I caution people to plant columbine with care, as it spreads given the proper conditions," Kelaidis says. Geranium blossoms are an early nectar source for pollinators, while mourning doves forage on their seeds. Columbines are the host plant for several beneficial insects and an important nectar source for hummingbirds, butterflies, bees and hummingbird moths. Another sun lover is wild strawberry, boasting early summer blossoms, edible fruit, and lovely red and maroon fall leaves.

Virginia creeper is an easy-to-grow deciduous vine with purplish leaves in spring that turn green in summer and purple or crimson in fall. The climber attaches to walls, boulders and other surfaces. "The vine supports all kinds of wildlife," says Megan Bowes with the Colorado Native Plant Society, "including one of our beautiful sphinx moths." Its foliage provides nesting habitat for birds, while many migrating bird species feed on its berries in late summer and early fall. Semicircles cut from the leaves are telltale signs that leafcutter bees have been busy making leaf cocoons for overwintering larvae.

Once established, however, Virginia creeper will need vigorous pruning to keep it from "creeping" all over.



80A547 GARDEN DEPARTMENT  
**RUSSIAN SAGE**  
 WANTED FOR QUESTIONING

**OFFENDER: RUSSIAN SAGE**  
 (PEROVSKIA ATRIPLICIFOLIA)

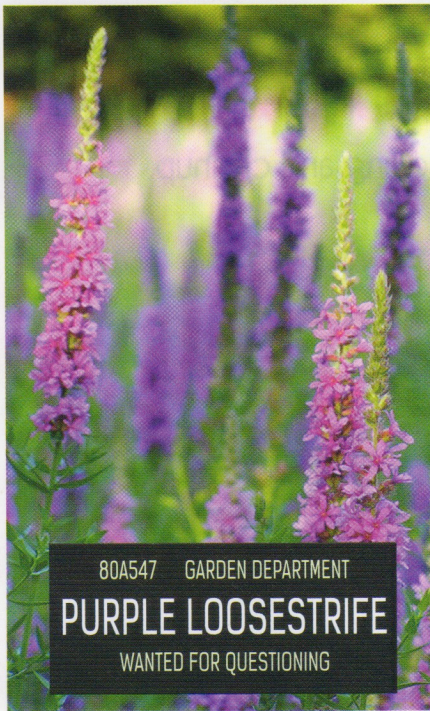
Admired for its fragrant foliage, lavender-purple flowers and ability to thrive in hot sun and dry soil, Russian sage is commonly planted, but spreads rapidly. Honeybees and other small insects use its flowers, but pollinators like butterflies don't. Elmore usually finds this plant in large swaths. "Pollinators need a wide variety," she says, so that when one plant's blossoms are spent, another is in bloom. It's best to use this hardy sage as "an industrial-strength plant requiring no water for a spot that would otherwise be unsightly," Kelaidis suggests.

**REPLACEMENTS:**

Though French lavender isn't native, butterflies and bees love it. "You'll also get a second set of blooms if you dead-head," Elmore says. Dotted gayfeather is a native sun-loving perennial with long-lasting purple color in late summer and fall. Plumbago is both drought and shade tolerant, with showy blue flowers favored by a variety of native bees. Pentstemons come in several varieties and are loved by pollinators, deer and birds.

Other options include purple coneflower, black-eyed Susan and common milkweed. "Any bee or butterfly will nectar on milkweed," says Bowes, "but these plants are a crucial host plant for monarch butterflies." They're also critical for the beautiful longhorn milkweed beetle.

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; EXCEPT BLACK-EYED SUSAN: WENDY VAN DYK EVANS; BUGWOOD.ORG; PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE: LIZ WEST; SULFUR-FLOWER BUCKWHEAT: DAVE POWELL/BUGWOOD.ORG; FIREWEED: DAVE POWELL/BUGWOOD.ORG



80A547 GARDEN DEPARTMENT  
**PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE**  
WANTED FOR QUESTIONING

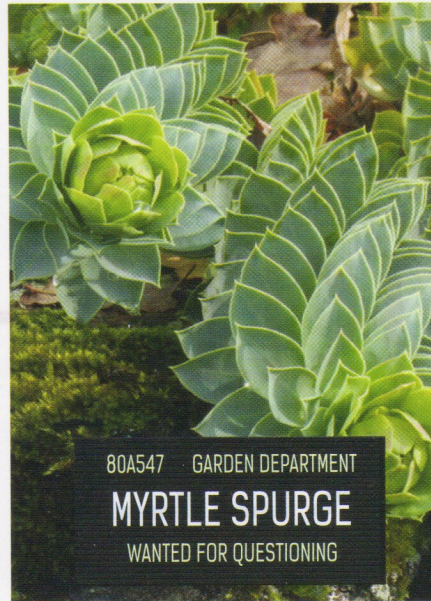
**OFFENDER: PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE** (*LYTHRUM SALICARIA*)

This wetland perennial of European descent has erect, multibranched stems and magenta flowers, and grows in a wide range of habitats. Each plant produces 2 to 3 million seeds annually, making it extremely aggressive. Classified a "List A" plant under Colorado's Noxious Weed Act, loosestrife is designated for eradication wherever found, in natural and urban areas. Since its introduction to this continent, it's threatened the life cycles of waterfowl, amphibians and algae, as well as water flows in irrigation ditches and other waterways.

**REPLACEMENTS:**

Fireweed is known for growing along highways and newly burned fallows. The tall stalks and brilliant pink flowers bloom from midsummer to the first frost, with scarlet leaves in fall. Bears, deer, elk and chipmunks favor it.

A member of the mint family, wild bergamot is an aromatic perennial that spreads by seeds and rhizomes. Its gray-green foliage and lavender flowers bloom from June to September, attracting bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Rocky Mountain penstemon has tall stalks with clusters of deep blue-violet blooms in summer, attracting a variety of pollinators.



80A547 GARDEN DEPARTMENT  
**MYRTLE SPURGE**  
WANTED FOR QUESTIONING

**OFFENDER: MYRTLE SPURGE** (*EUPHORBIA MYRSINITES*)

Native to Eurasia, this low-growing perennial with trailing stems of fleshy blue-green foliage was once promoted for xeriscapes and rock gardens, as it produces vibrant yellow flowers. Considered highly invasive, myrtle spurge readily expands into sensitive ecosystems. It's a "List A" noxious weed, which means all Colorado landowners are required to eradicate it from their yards. But wear gloves: The toxic, milky sap can cause severe skin irritation.

**REPLACEMENTS:**

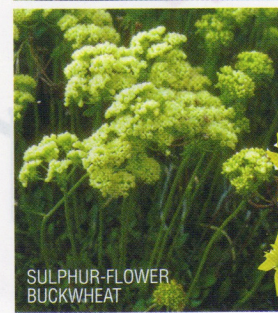
Creeping mahonia is a mounding evergreen ground cover that thrives in partial shade. The shiny holly-like leaves turn bronze in winter. Droopy clusters of fragrant, yellow spring flowers yield to showy purple berries loved



REPLACEMENTS:  
WILD BERGAMOT AND SPHINX MOTH



FIREWEED



SULPHUR-FLOWER BUCKWHEAT



YELLOW STONECROP

by birds and small mammals. One caveat: Once established, mahonia is very difficult to remove, Kelaidis says.

Sulphur-flower buckwheat has many different varieties and subspecies, but all form loose mats of leaves. Tiny yellow or cream flowers appear in spring before fading to orange or red. The seeds are an important food source for many birds and small mammals. Sulphur-flower buckwheat is the larval host and nectar source for the lupine blue butterfly; certain varieties are also associated with the cythera metalmark butterfly and the Rocky Mountain dotted-blue. Bees produce a strong, dark honey from its nectar.

Other replacements include yellow stonecrop, kinnikinnick, pussytoes and purple ice plant.

If you replace an offender with a beneficial plant, you'll help the environment and feed wildlife at the same time—a win-win! 🏠

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