Myrtle spurge
_Euphorbia myrsinites_

Myrtle spurge is a highly invasive ornamental plant that is popular in xeriscapes and rock gardens in residential areas of Colorado. This plant is rapidly expanding into sensitive ecosystems, displacing native vegetation and reducing forage for wildlife. It is a low-growing perennial with trailing stems of fleshy blue-green alternate leaves. Flowers are inconspicuous, surrounded by yellow-green flower-like bracts that appear from March to May. Myrtle spurge reproduces only by seed and is capable of projecting seeds up to 15 feet. This plant exudes a toxic, milky latex which can cause severe skin irritations. Wearing gloves, long sleeves, and shoes is highly recommended when in areas with myrtle spurge, as all plant parts are considered poisonous.

Alternatives to myrtle spurge include native plants such as sulphur flower (_Eryngium amethystinum_ or kineilirink (_Arctostaphylos uva-ursi_).

When an ornamental is described as “introduced,” “drought-tolerant,” “aggressive” or “weed-like resistant,” a responsible gardener should immediately ask themselves, “If I plant this, can I ensure that it won’t escape my garden?” If the answer is no, or even maybe, please don’t plant it.

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Russian-olive
_Olea europaea_ subsp. _angustifolia_

Russian-olive is a member of the Oleaster family. A hardy, fast-growing tree introduced from Europe, Russian-olive has been promoted for windbreak and ornamental plantings. This tree may reach heights from 10 to 25 feet. The trunks and branches are armed with one to two inch woody thorns. The leaves are covered with small scales that give foliage a distinctive silvery appearance. The fruit is berry-like, and is silvery when first formed but turns brown at maturity. According to Weber and Whitmire in Colorado Flora: Western Slopes, “This tree is rapidly replacing native riparian species and eliminating valuable nesting sites for birds. It should be eliminated whenever possible.” Fanjils and ranches may be impacted by Russian-olive as it invades pastures and blocks irrigation ditches.

Alternatives to Russian-olive include cottonwoods (_Populus deltoides_ or P. angustifolia_), chokecherry (_Prunus virginiana_), or silverleaf buffaloberry (_Shepherdia argentea_).

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Dalmatian toadflax and yellow toadflax
_Linaria genistifolia_ ssp. _dalmatica_ and _L. vulgaris_

These two toadflax species were introduced to North American gardens in the 1890s. Yellow toadflax, also known as butter and egg, can sometimes still be found for sale in Colorado. However, planting either of these plants is a recipe for disaster because they quickly escape from gardens to invade roadsides, native meadows, and pastures. Both species produce extensive root systems that allow them to steal water and nutrients from native plants. Their deep roots and spreading rhizomes allow toadflax patches to live indefinitely. Although they are laden with attractive yellow snapdragon-like flowers, the thousands of seeds produced by each plant can be spread far and wide by the wind, birds, and other animals. Once established, toadflaxes are very difficult to eradicate. There are many horticultural varieties of snapdragons that are not invasive. Ask your local nursery for help in choosing the right variety for your garden.

“If you are a garden plant you are regarded, well regarded, as long as you stay in the garden.”

Daves Gilbert

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Attractive Garden Plants?

They are noxious weeds. Invasive, ornamental weeds. And they are an ecological and agricultural disaster for Colorado.

A Guide to Invasive, Ornamental Weeds in Colorado

Produced by Colorado Big Country Resource Conservation & Development, Inc.
An Introduction to Invasive, Ornamental Weeds

Invasive, ornamental weeds continue to invade vast areas of pristine lands all across Colorado. People seeking more color, vigor, and something special for their gardens have unwittingly brought these non-native species into our environment. Unfortunately, most individuals don’t realize that they may have opened up Pandora’s box in their plantings. These non-native, aggressive weeds quickly escape and begin the demise of our native plant communities. A major hurdle in stopping the spread of these species is the misconception that something attractive can’t be a weed. On the contrary, invasive ornamental weeds like yellow toadflax, myrtle spurge, and Russian olive, have proven to be ecologically damaging and difficult to control once unleashed on our native landscapes.

This brochure highlights eight invasive ornamentals that are problematic in Colorado, designated as noxious weeds in the state, and are prohibited for sale. This brochure also suggests alternatives to invasive ornamentals. Please consult your local nursery, cooperative extension office, or garden center for native plants or for non-invasive introduced species.

Dame’s rocket

*Dipsacus sativus* (Labiatae) is a biennial or short-lived perennial forb, ranging from one to three feet in height. The flowers may be white, pink, or purple and start blooming in May. Dame’s rocket is aggressive in old and untended gardens. It has proven to invade freshly disturbed ground, and observations indicate that it will invade undisturbed riparian areas and steep slopes. There has been minimal research to date that has tracked this species, so the debate continues as to the actual invasive characteristics of this plant. It has been reported as an escape in Adams, Boulder, Eagle, Garfield, Gunnison, Jefferson, Larimer, Pitkin, and San Miguel Counties. Alternatives to dame’s rocket include Colorado columbine (*Aquilegia caerulea*) and lavender native bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa var. varmintfaeola*).

Oxeye daisy

*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* (Asteraceae) is an erect perennial plant with white ray and yellow disk flowers. Oxeye daisy is a native plant that typically blooms from June through August in Colorado’s higher elevations. A native of Eurasia, this aggressive species has escaped cultivation and becomes a troublesome weed in the intermountain west. Oxeye daisy is still commonly sold in wildflower seed mixes or transplanted as an ornamental despite its tendency to crowd out more desirable vegetation. A close relative, Shasta daisy is also an introduced plant that may be aggressive under certain circumstances but is preferable to oxeye daisy. Shasta is more robust than oxeye and has larger blooms. Alternatives to planting oxeye daisy include native daises (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia aristata*).

Bouncingbet

*Saponaria officinalis* is a member of the Pink family. A cottage garden escape, it is found along rights-of-way, meadows, and waste areas. Originally from Europe, it is now found throughout North America. Bouncingbet is an herbaceous perennial that grows one to three feet tall with pink to white flowers. The one-inch flowers are arranged in clusters. Each flower has five to six petals with a notch at the tip. The plant spreads by rhizome and is usually found in colonies. The leaves are opposite and the stems are jointed, usually without hairs. Bouncingbet contains saponin, a soapy substance that has been used to clean fabrics. It is poisonous to livestock and is unpalatable. An alternative to bouncingbet is garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*).

More escaped invasive ornamentals to be aware of:

- Chicory (*Chicorium intybus*)
- Chinese clematis (*Clematis orientalis*)
- Common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)
- Cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*)
- Mediterranean sage (*Salvia aethiopis*)
- Orange hawkweed (*Hieracium aurantiacum*)
- Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- Saltcedar (*Tamarix parviflora and T. ramosissima*)
- St. Johnswort (*Hypericum perforatum*)