

SEPTEMBER HORTICULTURE NOTES

Choosing Native Plants

This month, I will share with you why I have decided to eliminate some of my favorite plants. About 5 or 6 years ago I received cuttings of *Euonymus alatus*, the burning bush we all love in October for its gorgeous brilliant red color and the rest of the year for its graceful natural shape. After several years of nursing those cuttings, I finally have a beautiful hedge. However, after attending several classes on invasive species, I am aware that this plant produces seeds that my local birds find and eat. But, the birds are not nourished by these seeds; in fact, they become sick from them.

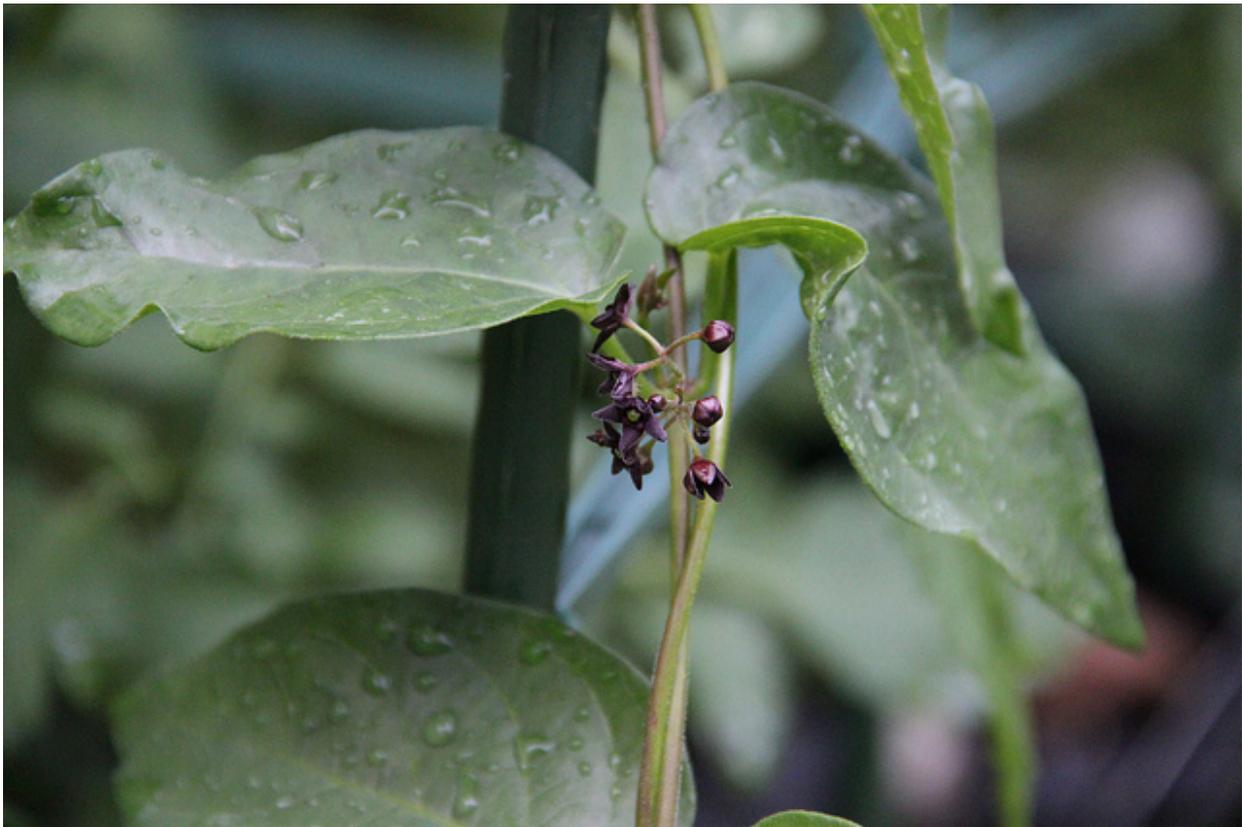
Therefore, I have decided to remove my beautiful *Euonymus* hedge at the end of this season, after I have enjoyed one last show of its wonderful red leaves. Next year, in its place, I will plant a row of native *Cyanococcus* – blueberries – which will provide healthy food for the birds and some lovely red color in the fall. But, alas, not the graceful form that I also treasure.

We are suffering the loss of many of our native trees and shrubs that nourish our birds. At an ecology class I learned that our whole landscape is in serious danger of changing dramatically over the next 100 years. Somehow, invasives such as oriental bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, buckthorns of various kinds, Norway maples, and Japanese wisteria, along with the above-mentioned burning bush, prevent the seeds of our native maples and oaks, among others, from germinating and growing by cutting off the sunlight they require to develop into trees.

According to those ecologists, our grandchildren may not be enjoying the beautiful autumns we are just concluding here in New England. The native maples and oaks might be gone from the landscape!!! Thus, for the rest of the year, my horticulture notes will focus on how we can avoid planting some of these invasives, how we can remove some of them, and what we can plant instead.

Because we are now close to the Monarch Butterfly migration (it usually takes place around Columbus Day, Oct. 11), I want to alert you to another invasive plant – a vine related to our native milkweeds – which may be contributing to the decline

in the Monarch Butterfly population. It is called *Cynanchum louiseae* – black swallowwort. It has a graceful form, a lovely shiny dark leaf, and its seed pods look very much like those of the native milkweeds. It also spreads just like our natives by both multiple seed dispersal and underground roots. Monarch Butterflies are unable to distinguish between the native and the invasive, so they lay their eggs under the leaves of the black swallowwort. When the caterpillar emerges and begins to eat the leaves, it is poisoned and we have one less Monarch Butterfly. If you happen to find this plant on your property or in a neighbor's, please dig it out, and pass the word. It's hard to eradicate, but if we keep it down and plant the native milkweed, we'll be moving in a positive direction!



Close-up of leaves and flower buds of the Black Swallowwort.



The Black Swallowwort vines and climbs on anything around it. It spreads via underground runners.



The Black Swallowwort also spreads its seed when pods open – just like our native milkweed.