

# WANTED

## INVASIVE PLANTS THAT CHOKE OFF NATIVE SPECIES IN GARDENS AND COUNTRYSIDE



**1** NORWAY  
MAPLE



**2** MULTIFLORA  
ROSE



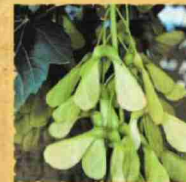
**3** BARBERRY



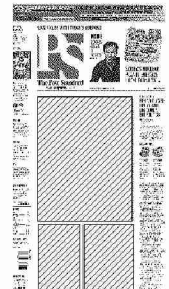
**4** BUSH  
HONEYSUCKLE



**5** BURNING  
BUSH



**6** SYCAMORE  
MAPLE



# SOME PLANTS ON BAN LIST ARE POPULAR PICKS FOR LANDSCAPING

**By Marnie Eisenstadt**  
 Staff writer

If you are determined to get a new burning bush, Japanese barberry hedge or Norway maple, now's the time to plant.

They are popular and colorful landscaping choices, but — like dozens of other plants and animals — their days are numbered in New York.

All three are likely to end up on a state list of outlawed plants. The go-to decorations for mulchy gardens will be like fireworks: You can't bring them into the state, you can't sell them and if you get caught with them, you can be fined. If you have them in your yard already, you're OK.

**STATE TO SEEK PUBLIC INPUT ON WHICH SPECIES TO BAN; COME SEPTEMBER 2013, VIOLATING RULES WILL BRING FINE**

What makes them so popular is also part of their curse.

They adapt well to almost any environment and reproduce bunny-fast. They're also what are called invasive species. By September 2013, the state will ban the worst offenders.

Invasive plants are often brought from another country because they'll look great in a garden. But they break free of the beds outside our homes and end up on forest floors and in fields, overwhelming native ferns and shrubs. They disrupt entire ecosystems.

**SOME, PAGE A-8**

Invasive animals come in as pets because they're cute, furry, scary and cool. But they escape, find a sweetheart and take over waterways or farm fields.

The plant list is well under way. A team of scientists, including plant specialists from the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, has graded more than 180 plants. Burning bush, Norway maple, Sycamore maple and Japanese barberry, a popular hedge, were losers: They spread easily and choke out important native plants.

Aquatic plants on the list include hydrilla, an invasive weed that destroys freshwater habitats. It was found recently in the Cayuga Inlet, in Ithaca, and is such a problem that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held a conference in Syracuse earlier this month aimed at keeping the weed out of the Finger Lakes.

The animal list is still being developed and won't be as extensive.

But some animals should run for cover: feral pigs, feral goats, hedgehogs, mute swans, emerald ash borers, Asian carp, zebra mussels, round goby fish and a variety of reptiles. These all have no natural predators in New York and have the potential to spread unchecked in forests and streams.

And then there's a newly popular little critter called an Asian raccoon dog that's in trouble, too. It's cute and widely available in the underground pet market. It looks like a cross between a big ferret and a raccoon. What happens when it gets off its leash, into nature and finds a mate? No one wants to find out.

## HOGWEED GOES HOG WILD

Invasive plants and animals have been a problem since Europeans began colonizing America. They're often introduced to fill a need but grow out of control without the natural checks and balances of their home soil and normal predators, said Chuck O'Neill, director of the New York Invasive Species Clearinghouse.

Take the giant hogweed. It's a plant that looks like Queen Anne's lace stuck under a magnifying glass. Giant hogweed can grow 14 feet tall with leaves more than 5 feet wide and looks exotic in an ornamental garden, O'Neill said. Gardeners imported the plant, originally from Asia, to put in the Highland Park gardens in Rochester in the 1800s, he said.

But now it's everywhere, including along the creekwalk in Syracuse. It's choking out other plants, it's difficult to pull out and it's poisonous. If you break a leaf or the stem and touch the clear sap, you can get a blistering rash that leaves scars. If the sap gets in your eye, it can cause blindness.

It's so well known as a dangerous plant that no one sells it anymore.

New York's invasive species law is similar to those on the books in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Indiana. All but four states have a law that at least identifies invasive weeds to control, said Scott Hendrick, a policy analyst at the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The reason is more than environmental. A 1999 study at Cornell University estimated the national damage to crops, livestock and natural areas from invasive species at \$138 billion each year.

That study put the number of foreign plant and animal species in the U.S. at more than 50,000, and it blamed early importers for invaders as diverse as rats, which came from Europe and Norway, and purple loosestrife, a plant imported for ornamental gardens in the 1900s that can be seen on almost every country roadside.

Purple loosestrife has forever changed wetlands across the country. And there are more than 1 billion rats on U.S. farms.

New York's law is common sense, said Donald Leopold, a tree expert and chairman of the department of environmental and forest biology at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry. People should choose plants that are native, or at least not invasive, when they landscape, he said.

"There are 200 maples in the world. Norway maple is one of the most invasive of all," Leopold said. "We have to have laws for when common sense doesn't prevail."

Norway maple is pushing out other native maples, including black maple and sugar maple, the trees responsible for maple syrup.

"They're going to alter our natural diversity to the point where we lose native species," Leopold said.

He said garden stores should push people to native alternatives. His neighbor has a hedge of Japanese barberry, one of the likely banned plants. Leopold,

instead, has a highbush blueberry hedge. His blueberry bush is just as colorful and lush, he said, "and I get quarts of blueberries."

## BANS TRIED ELSEWHERE

Marie Peterson thinks the list is too restrictive.

"It's based on incomplete science," said Peterson, who oversees the nursery at Chuck Hafner's Garden Market and Farm Center, in North Syracuse.

She sells a few dozen Norway maples, hundreds of burning bush plants and thousands of Japanese barberry bushes every year. But none links to its original variety now found to have spread out into natural areas, she said. The varieties sold in nurseries have been changed genetically by growers to create different characteristics. Because of that, they cannot spread easily in nature, Peterson said. Their seeds usually aren't viable.

The Norway maples she sells have purple leaves, not the green leaves on the type found spreading through forests. The retail burning bush plants are mostly pygmies, called "Little Moses." And there are hundreds of kinds of Japanese barberry.

She said it won't be hard to stop selling the Norway maples or the burning bush. There are plenty of alternatives to those that Peterson recommends to customers. But the Japanese barberry will be a big loss. The ban would likely cover the hundreds of varieties of the shrubby, colorful plant she sells, she said.

"It's reckless to get rid of all of those alternatives," Peterson said.

Leopold, the biology professor and tree expert, disagrees. He said if the genetically altered varieties produce seeds — and almost all of them do — they can reproduce, should be considered invasive and should be banned.

Some stores have phased out many of the invasive plants. Ballantyne Gardens, in Salina, hasn't sold Norway maples or burning bushes in years, said owner Lisa Ballantyne. The nursery points people to other maple trees and blueberry bushes.

The proposed list and lists adopted in other states cover all the genetic variations of the invasive plants. But there's still time for change. The state has to look at the economic impact of banning each plant. Then the public will have an opportunity to comment on the list.

Massachusetts' law has been in effect since 2006. Its list includes all the high

scorers on New York's draft list.

Nurseries were given two years to sell their banned plants. Jennifer Forman-Orth, plant pest survey coordinator for that state's Department of Agricultural Resources, said the law has been effective.

She gets calls if people think someone else is selling the banned plants. That's what happened over Labor Day weekend, when a big-box home improvement store had burning bush on sale in its ad. After calling the store, she found it was an ad used all over the country. They weren't selling the banned plant in Massachusetts. She said there have been fewer than 20 violations and no fines.

"Honestly, the public has gotten the word about this," Forman-Orth said. "They don't want these plants planted in their yards."

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## AMONG THE WORST OFFENDERS:

**1 NORWAY MAPLE:** A favorite of developers because it's cheap, looks pretty and grows fast. But it reproduces quickly and chokes out other native trees, like the sugar maple.

**2 MULTIFLORA ROSE:** A miniature rose used in ornamental gardens as a hedge or living wall. It spreads quickly and easily, creating thickets more than 9 feet high and 13 feet wide, making it hard for native plants to grow. It was the USDA's "Weed of the Week" in 2006.

**3 BARBERRY:** People like it because it's a cheap, fast-growing purple hedge with thorns good for keeping out unwanted visitors. But it escapes easily and takes over forest underbrush. It's allelopathic, which means it gives off a chemical that makes it hard for other plants to grow near it.

**4 BUSH HONEYSUCKLE:** It looks pretty, smells great and can grow in almost any kind of soil. But bush honeysuckle grows out of control in a hurry. And, like barberry, it's thought to give off a substance that makes the soil near it poisonous to other plants.

**5 BURNING BUSH:** An inexpensive shrub with brilliant red leaves in the fall. It's easy and cheap to grow. But it produces hundreds of durable seeds that birds eat, then dispose of wherever they land next. This has led to fields of burning bush growing out of control.

**6 SYCAMORE MAPLE:** People like it because it grows easily and quickly in a variety of soils. But what's good about it is also bad. That adaptability and the hundreds of "helicopter" seeds that one tree produces lead to thick, dense stands of trees that take over natural areas and push out native trees. Sycamore maple was the USDA's "Weed of the Week" in 2005.

Sources: Donald Leopold, chairman of the forest and environmental biology department at SUNY-ESF; Jennifer Forman Orth, State Plant Pest Survey Coordinator, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. USDA.



**BURNING BUSH** plants are sold at Chuck Hafner's Garden Market and Farm Center, in North Syracuse. Nursery manager Marie Peterson said she sells a pygmy variety that does not cause the same problems as other burning bushes, but there are alternative plants she can recommend.

David Lassman / The Post-Standard



Al Grillo / AP



**NORWAY MAPLE** is an invasive plant that pushes out native maples, including black and sugar maples. A hedgehog curls up in the hands of its owner at a hedgehog club exhibit in Anchorage, Alaska. Hedgehogs quills can penetrate skin and have been known to spread bacteria that can cause fever, stomach pain and a rash.