



## ISLAND COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED PROGRAM WEED ALERT

*Buddleia davidii*

**Butterfly Bush**

Buddleia Family

### Non-Regulated Noxious Weed: Control Recommended

#### Identification Tips

Deciduous shrub up to 15 feet tall with arching branches  
Showy flower spikes at branch ends, upright or nodding, 4 to 30 inches long  
Flowers typically light purple with an orange center, but a range of cultivars come in a variety of colors, including magenta, blue, white and dark purple  
Leaves are 4 to 10 inches long, 1 to 3 inches wide, dark green on top and whitish underneath  
Leaves grow in opposite pairs  
Young stems are green, older stems have peeling, gray-brown bark

#### Biology

Flowers from early June into mid-October  
Reproduces mainly by lightweight, winged seeds but can also develop roots on branches that have been buried or broken off  
It is quick to mature, often producing seeds during its first year of growth  
A single flower spike can produce 40,000 seeds  
Seeds remain viable in soil for 3 to 5 years

#### Impacts

Widespread growth due to lightweight seeds that move easily by wind and water to new areas  
Invades riverbanks, forming dense thickets, crowding out native vegetation such as willows  
Also impedes forest regeneration  
Once established, butterfly bush is tough to eliminate

#### Distribution

Found in disturbed areas such as riverbanks, roadsides, pastures and recently logged or burned forests as well as flower gardens and lawns  
Flourishes in well-drained soil and full sun, but can also grow in challenging conditions such as cracks in pavement, under bridges and along railroad tracks



Despite its friendly sounding name and pretty flowers, this plant doesn't provide suitable food or habitat for native butterfly larvae.



This popular garden plant has started moving into natural areas, creating problems.

## What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling butterfly bush in Island County and it is still sold in Washington state, the Island County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes this plant as invasive and recommends prevention of spread into uninfested areas and control in natural areas where feasible.

## Control Methods

Choose one or a combination of control methods listed below. Once established, this plant can be difficult to eradicate from an area. Consider alternative plants for your landscape. There are many showy, butterfly-attracting plants that are non-invasive and well suited for the Pacific Northwest (see box).

**Prevention:** If you have butterfly bush on your property and are reluctant to remove it, take measures to prevent it from establishing elsewhere. That can be easily done by preventing seeding. Remove spent flowerheads in the fall before they disperse seeds (don't wait until spring) and discard in the trash to avoid spreading seeds. Composting seedheads is not recommended.

**Manual:** Seedlings can be hand-pulled with little effort; larger bushes will take more time and labor. Branches should not be left on the bare ground as they can form roots and re-grow. Never discard any part of this plant in natural areas or on roadsides. Branches can be burned (if your area allows burning), put in your yard waste container, or taken to a landfill or composting facility. Seedheads, however, should always be placed in the trash.

**Cultural/Grazing:** Although goats will eat butterfly bush and can damage it, they will not kill or eradicate this plant. Consider using goat grazing as part of an integrated program with other methods, perhaps followed up with manual or chemical treatment.

**Chemical:** Controlling butterfly bush by spraying with a brush-control herbicide is somewhat effective, but for better results, cut the trunk off at the base and immediately apply concentrated glyphosate (such as Roundup) or triclopyr (such as Garlon or Brush B Gon) to the freshly cut surface. Always follow the label directions on any herbicide product you use to minimize any potential risks to you and the environment. **Follow all applicable laws and regulations regarding herbicide use on your site.**

### A Better Alternative: California Lilac



California lilac is a profusely blooming evergreen shrub that makes a nice alternative to butterfly bush. It is fast-growing, drought-tolerant and has fragrant blue flowers that attract butterflies and honey bees. It also tolerates poor soils. Other alternatives include chaste tree for hot, sunny sites and Pacific ninebark for sunny or shady areas. Additionally, Chilean potato vine, red-flowering currant, orange-ball butterfly bush and fallowiana butterfly bush make wonderful flowering additions to the garden. Best of all, they won't escape to cause problems down the road!

### Questions?

Call Island County Noxious Weed Control Board 360-678-7992  
<https://www.islandcountywa.gov/344/Noxious-Weeds>