



# Simply Native

Using Native Plants to Enhance Landscapes & Gardens



An educational series brought to you through a partnership between the Georgia Piedmont Land Trust and the Georgia Native Plant Society

Our series called **Simply Native** offers information about the value and reasons to select native plants for your home landscape or garden and about certain other species which have become invasive. This issue highlights selected trees. The Georgia Piedmont Land Trust and the Georgia Native Plant Society encourage the use of native plants because it's the smart thing to do for many reasons.

## Bring a fringe into your garden



By the time winter is losing its grip on southern gardens, homeowners pine for a beautiful show of flowers to celebrate the new spring that's just about to emerge.

One native plant, perfect as a small tree (to 25') for many landscapes, is the Fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), (photo above), also known as Grancy Greybeard or old man's beard. Fragrant, delicate, creamy white flowers cascade in 6" – 8" clusters from last year's branches of this deciduous tree around April.

Plant these trees in somewhat acid, fertile, well-drained soil. As with all newly installed plants, they must be carefully watered until established, particularly if sited in full sun.

Fringe trees are slow growing, but they are "typically tough, trouble-free plants once established," according to Gil Nelson in *Best Native Plants for Southern Gardens*.

He also notes, "Although it is often set off as a specimen plant in an open setting, it may be at its best in combination with other plants. The abundance of spring flowers will light up a dreary edge of winter greenery and it is particularly stunning when mixed with

spring-flowering native azaleas." After spring flowering, female trees will bear olive-like fruits that turn from green to dark blue. Large, lustrous leaves are medium to dark green in color, providing a handsome foil for summer perennials and smaller shrubs.



BlueRidgeKitties photo.

## Or try a Serviceberry

If two-season color is more to your liking, consider planting a Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea* and others), a small tree (to 25', but usually smaller) or shrub. This family of seven or so native species erupts (photo, left) in "showy clusters of pinkish to bright white flowers that form a particularly eye-catching display in late winter woodlands and gardens," writes Gil Nelson.



Then, "the final landscape reward of serviceberries is excellent and frequently enduring fall foliage color that ranges from old gold to brilliant red-orange," according to *Growing & Propagating Showy Native Plants* by Richard Bir (photo, right).



Ellen Honeycutt photos.

For best flowering results, plant in full sun, but "serviceberries are easy to grow, tolerant of a wide range of soils, transplant easily from pots, and can be sited in full sun or filtered shade," says Nelson. They prefer a well drained location and will not tolerate soggy conditions.

An extra appeal for both of these spring beauties: they provide nourishment for wildlife, including pollinators and birds. In fact, you may never see the berries (photo left) of the serviceberry, since they will be a favorite on the menu of birds that eat berries, such as cedar waxwings, robins and other thrushes, bluejays and catbirds.



## ***A good tree to remove from your garden***

*Simply Native* showcases terrific native plant species for your garden or landscape, but it also raises awareness about plant species that are harming our environment.

You can use a Fringe tree or a Serviceberry to replace one such bad actor: the Bradford pear.

Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) is native to China. In 1918, according to a factsheet from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, "seed was brought to the United States for potential use as rootstock for cultivated pears." One vigorous, seedling without the spines typical of the Callery species, was selected, named 'Bradford,' and in successive decades it and other ornamental pears, including 'Cleveland Select' and 'Chanticleer' became a landscape hit.

"The Bradford variety of pear, which produced sterile fruits, has been widely planted throughout the United States, but recent cultivars, bred to reduce the tree's tendency to split in snow or high winds, have produced viable seeds and escaped to invade disturbed areas," according to Invasive.org, a resource of the Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, a collaborative effort by the USDA and the University of Georgia. The fruit is rarely eaten by any wildlife except squirrels.



Invasive.org's brief review identifies the aspects of Bradford pear that make it exceptionally undesirable for home gardens and landscapes: Today, it's overplanted (Do you really want a plant in your yard that everyone else has by the dozens?); it suffers damage easily; and it

now is degrading natural areas by reproducing and outcompeting native species.

Any of these reasons is a good one to find an alternative to Bradford pear when the one in your front yard splits unattractively.

But consider this from Douglas Tallamy, professor and Chair of the Department of Entomology and Ecology, University of Delaware in *Bringing Nature Home*: "For the past century we have created our gardens with one thing in mind: aesthetics. Yet if we designed our buildings the way we design our gardens, they would fall down. Just as buildings need support structures – girders, I-beams, and headers – to hold the graceful arches and beautiful lines of fine architecture in place, our gardens need native plants to support a diverse and balanced food web essential to all sustainable ecosystems."

Tallamy also states, "For the first time in its history, gardening has taken on a role that transcends the needs of the gardener: Like it or not, gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation's wildlife."

Making the choice to replace Bradford pear for such beauties as Fringetree and Serviceberry – available at local nurseries such as Buck Jones Nursery in Grayson and Woodstock, Nearly Native Nursery in Fayetteville and Randy's in Lawrenceville – is a fine way to provide support structures for all the birds, butterflies, pollinators and other wildlife we want in our gardens.

### **ABOUT**

The Georgia Piedmont Land Trust and Georgia Native Plant Society have partnered to create an informational series to encourage Georgia gardeners to incorporate Georgia's native plants into their landscapes and gardens.

The **Georgia Piedmont Land Trust (GPLT)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of open and green space in the Piedmont region of Georgia. GPLT believes that protected natural and open spaces are essential for healthy communities, positive quality of life and the wildlife that depends upon this habitat. For more information visit our website at: [www.gplt.org](http://www.gplt.org)

The **Georgia Native Plant Society (GNPS)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the stewardship and conservation of Georgia's native plants and their habitats. For more information visit our website at: [www.gnps.org](http://www.gnps.org)



David Moorhead photo, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org.