

The Curious Case of the Callery Pear

Ah, the beauty of springtime in Oklahoma as the earth awakens from its' winter dormancy. What are those white blossoms on those trees over there? Is that a stand of wild plum trees? No, my friend, those trees are the infamous callery pear.

We've been invaded. Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) is one of the most common invasive species in the U.S. Brought to the United States over a century ago to help combat fire blight in the pear industry, every spring its' prolific white blossoms are visible along roadsides, in old fields, and in vacant urban and suburban lots. Some have likened the smell of the flowers to rotting fish. It has also managed to encroach into natural and managed forests. Callery pear comes, in part, from *P. calleryana* cultivars like Bradford, Aristocrat, Cleveland Select and others. Management is difficult, as some cultivars of Callery pear are covered in strong, woody thorns and form dense patches that eliminate competing vegetation. As one expert said, "The only thing that grows under a Callery pear is another Callery pear". They are difficult to kill.

How did we get to this place? When the Bradford pear was being developed, they used the Callery pear as root stock and grafted a thorn less, prolific seeding pear onto it. The resulting Bradford pear was introduced into the market in 1961. It had \$23,000,000 in sales that year alone. Bradford pears were planted everywhere to beautify the landscape. By 1964 it had escaped cultivation and gone into the wild in Arkansas. By 1980 when the trees were about 20 years old, structural problems were noticed. Branch angles are steep and unstable; therefore, they break easily, especially in high winds or ice storms.

The Callery pear behaves differently in North America than in its' native range of China, Japan and other parts of Asia. Because it leaves out early in spring and holds its' leaves longer in fall, it has an advantage over native plants which may go dormant earlier. Some cultivars grow sturdy thorns up to 3" in length. These thorns can puncture tires on trucks and machinery. They can also pierce the hooves of livestock and if not noticed, could result in a wound infection. The seeds are widely spread by birds and pollinators.

What is the solution? Can you kill it with fire? No, only the top burns and then the stump re-sprouts.

Can you cut it down? Yes, but again it will re-sprout. Treat the stump with a good herbicide and mow over the sprouts if possible.

What works best? Use a good foliar herbicide but do it when the tree is small. Herbicides containing triclopyr or glyphosate work well.

One unique solution has been tried by the cities of Fayetteville, Arkansas, St. Louis, Missouri and Clemson, South Carolina. They offered a "Bradford Pear Bounty". If a homeowner sent in a selfie with a cut down pear tree, they were given a free new tree for their landscape.

Advice from Experts: Remove sooner rather than later!

Resources:

OSU Fact Sheets: [L-469 The Invasive Callery Pear](#)

[NREM-2895 Problem Horticultural Plants](#)

NAISMA (North American Invasive Species Management Association) Webinar, 4/8/20 “What’s That Smell? The Curious Case of the Callery Pear” presented by Dr. Dave Coyle, Assistant Professor, Clemson University

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