

The Despicable Six

By Jeannette Franks, PhD



A non-native noxious weed isn't just a nuisance; these are criminals in your yard. They can damage livestock and agriculture, destroy salmon streams, poison your children, and make you look like a bad neighbor. Some, like Tansy Ragwort, are downright illegal! These six have been chosen because they are common in our area, important to get rid of, and easy to replace with more attractive, environmentally-friendly plants.

Butterfly “Killer” Bush, *Buddleja davidii*, is thought to actually harm butterflies. Although the flowers attract butterflies, when the larvae are born, Butterfly Bush is not edible to them and they die. Each purple panicle spreads hundreds of seeds. It is commonly found in gardens, parks, and open spaces. What to plant instead: Ceanothus, Pacific Ninebark, or lilacs.

English Ivy, *Hedera helix*, is a true scourge. Brought over by homesick Brits, the ‘old-growth’ ivy at Blakely Park on Bainbridge Island, when Weed Warriors started removing it, had vines as big around as my head! We had to use chainsaws. Ivy brings trees down onto our power lines and smothers streams. A lovely native replacement is kinnikinnic or plant climbing hydrangea. You already know what ivy looks like!

Scotch Broom, *Cytisus scoparius*, is a nasty land grabber. Ah-choo! Many are allergic to the bright yellow blossoms and it crowds out everybody! Pull it if you can; if not, cutting broom to the ground can kill it. A great replacement is evergreen and/or deciduous huckleberry.

Spurge Laurel, *Daphne laureola*, is just now being recognized as a triple threat. It is so lovely that even experienced gardeners sometimes leave it in place. One plant generates literally thousands of seeds, and the white sap is an allergen. Plant instead the aromatic *Daphne odora*, which is adored.

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Stinky Bob, *Geranium robertium*, was so-named by Linnaeus because he had a friend Robert with terrible body odor. It exudes a toxin which inhibits the growth of beloved natives. If you see these small pink flowers with lacy leaves in a park or forest, yank the plants out! Otherwise say goodbye to the exquisite trilliums!

Tansy Ragwort is a toxic noxious weed with an attractive rosette of deeply lobed leaves. The daisy-like yellow flower heads generally have 13 petals. Because all parts are lethal to cattle and horses, you are required by law to get rid of it. Plant pretty verbenas, salal, or wallflowers instead.

For more information: <http://www.sustainablebainbridge.org/introduction-to-weeds.aspx> and <http://extension.wsu.edu/kitsap/nrs/noxious>