

## INVASIVE OF THE MONTH

### **Giving the burn to burning bush**

*From Brodhead Watershed Association*

Like so many non-native, invasive plants, burning bush started life in the United States when people intentionally introduced it from Asia as a landscape shrub in the 1860s.

With its cork-like bark and brilliant fall color, it's not hard to see why that seemed like a good idea. But burning bush (*euonymous alata*) is incredibly prolific. Hundreds of seedlings can be found in the "seed shadow" below a single parent plant. Birds feast on the seeds and disperse them far and wide. It germinates easily. It tolerates full shade and all kinds of soil, including our acid woodland soils. It easily out-competes native plants and creates large thickets, crowding out and shading out natives.



That's why, as you drive many local roads at this time of year, the understory of our native woodlands is ablaze with enormous infestations of burning bush — as far as the eye can see.

Because it is such a pest, many garden centers have voluntarily stopped selling it. Careful gardeners won't plant it. But if you have some, take heart. It can be controlled.

Seedlings and first- and second-year plants can be pulled up by the roots, bagged, and put in the trash. Be sure you pull the entire root system, as any bits left in the ground can regrow. It's best to do this early in spring, before the plant sets seeds. Even one seed left behind can sprout and start the cycle all over again.

If you have a large, established shrub — burning bush can reach well over 12 feet high and 12 feet wide — eradicating it will take a little more attention. The best time is July, August and up to mid-September. That's when carbohydrates and other plant compounds are being manufactured in the leaves and drawn from the leaves down to the roots for storage. This natural downward flow helps pull weed killer to the roots. Mechanical control by cutting is also very effective during these months for the same reason. For example, when you cut the top off any plant, the roots naturally respond by sprouting — pushing up more top growth, which reduces the root's reserves and stresses the plant. Every time you cut the top off, you force the plant to sprout — reducing the root reserves and weakening the plant.



#### **HOW TO PROCEED**

During July, August, and up to mid-September, cut your target plant(s) down to 1 inch from the ground. Immediately apply straight glyphosate herbicide such as Roundup “poison ivy killer.” If you want to start earlier, in March, April, May, and June, you can cut the stump 6 to 12 inches from the ground,

and let it sprout. Then cut the sprouted plant in July, August, or early September to 1 inch from the ground and apply herbicide as above.

Always work very carefully with herbicide, and keep well away from creeks, wetlands, and other sensitive ecosystems. Infestations in these areas require the skill of a licensed technician. For information, see [extension.psu.edu/burning-bush](http://extension.psu.edu/burning-bush).