

TITLE: Butterfly Bush

Description: Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja davidii* – often spelled *Buddleia*) is a favorite shrub of many gardeners because of its colorful flowers and ability to attract a variety of beneficial insects, and is particularly attractive to butterflies. This deciduous to semi-evergreen shrub typically grows from 6 to 10 feet tall by 4 to 10 feet wide with a rather open, arching form.

Objective(s): Gain the confidence to radically prune Butterfly Bush annually to maximize the flower display and keep the plant from becoming overgrown and ragged looking. Realize that they benefit from hard pruning – and that hard pruning is easier than selective pruning.

WHAT: Butterfly Bush is a summer-blooming, cane shrub that benefits from radical pruning. This should be done while the plant is dormant, as they flower on new growth.

WHY: Pruning Butterfly bushes hard (to within one foot of the ground) annually enhances the flower display.



WHEN: Butterfly Bush is a summer blooming shrub and should be pruned while dormant. In east TN, this usually means mid-January to mid-February. Avoid fall or winter pruning, as that increases the risk of cold damage to tender new growth – which then requires a second, selective pruning.

WHERE: Full sun is needed to ensure adequate flowering. Butterfly bushes are amazingly tough plants and grow well under a variety of conditions. The one critical requirement is well-drained soil as their roots will quickly rot when waterlogged.

HOW: 1) Butterfly bush provides an opportunity to practice what looks like renovation pruning – cutting all the canes to within one foot of the ground – while the plant is dormant. Once the entire bush has been reduced, you can then selectively cut older canes all the way to the ground to reduce cane crowding.

2) After flowering, the dark seed heads are generally considered unattractive. Deadheading (a form of pruning) provides a neater look to the plant. While not necessary, deadheading will lengthen the bloom period, and prevent unwanted seedlings from sprouting nearby.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Butterfly Bush is fast growing. It grows up to 10' tall in a single season.
- Butterfly Bush is a summer blooming shrub, and should be pruned while dormant.
- Be sure the Butterfly Bush is dormant before pruning. Pruning before dormancy runs the risk of cold weather damage and the need for a second pruning.
- Butterfly Bush benefits from hard pruning, cutting back to within one foot of the ground.
- Hard pruning of a Butterfly Bush is easier than selectively removing canes at ground level.
- Some Asian varieties of Butterfly Bush are listed as invasive species in TN and other states. If purchasing a new plant, be sure to choose a newer, hybrid variety. (see UT reference below)
 - If it has become invasive in your garden, deadhead the flowers as they fade and before they set seed.
 - Your other option is to remove the invasive species shrub completely.

Additional Resources / References:

Butterfly Bush, UT Gardens, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture
<https://ag.tennessee.edu/news/Pages/POM-2019-08.aspx>

Butterfly Bush, Kansas State, Johnson County Master Gardeners
<https://www.johnson.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/agent-articles/trees-shrubs/butterfly-bush.html>

Butterfly Bush, Clemson Cooperative Extension <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/butterfly-bush/>

Butterfly Bush, University of Maryland <https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/butterfly-bush>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: www.knoxcountymastergardener.org

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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