

Butterfly Bush

(*Buddleja davidii*)



Family name: Scrophulariaceae (Figwort family)

Common name/s: Butterfly Bush, Summer Lilac, Orange Eye



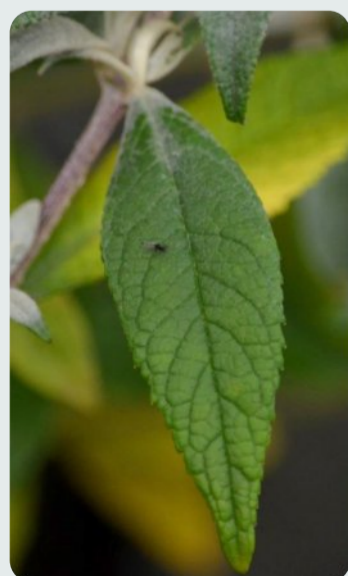
Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja davidii*) is a deciduous shrub widely cultivated for its showy flowers that attract butterflies and other pollinators. In Ireland, it is considered an invasive species, particularly in disturbed and riparian habitats, where it can outcompete native vegetation.

The plant spreads primarily through wind-dispersed seeds, making management challenging. Control measures include mechanical removal, herbicide application, and preventing planting near natural habitats. While attractive to pollinators, Butterfly Bush's invasiveness can negatively impact local ecosystems and biodiversity.

Description - Butterfly Bush is a fast-growing shrub known for its colourful, long, arching flower spikes. It has been introduced to many regions worldwide, including Ireland, as an ornamental plant but has become invasive in some areas due to its ability to spread rapidly and colonise disturbed habitats.

Key characteristics include:

Height: Typically grows to a height of 1.5 to 5 metres, with a spread of 2-4 metres. The plant has a broad, arching form and can grow quickly, particularly in disturbed areas.



Leaves: The leaves are opposite, lance-shaped, and grey-green, measuring 10-30 cm in length. They have a rough texture on the upper surface and are densely hairy underneath, giving them a whitish appearance.

Flowers: Produces dense, conical flower spikes (panicles) that are 10-30 cm long, typically blooming from summer to early autumn. The flowers are usually purple with an orange centre, but varieties with white, pink, or dark purple blooms also exist. They are fragrant and highly attractive to butterflies and other pollinators.

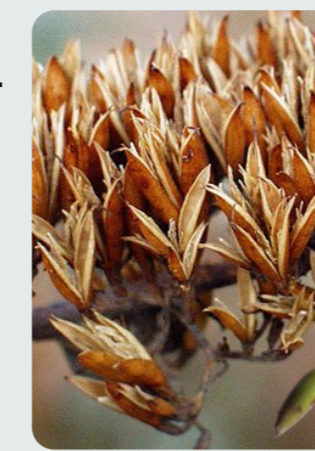


Fruit: Forms small, brown capsules that contain numerous tiny seeds, which are dispersed by wind.



Stem: The stems are woody and can become brittle with age.

Young stems are often green or reddish, while older stems develop a greyish-brown bark.



Root: Has a fibrous root system that enables it to establish quickly in a variety of soil types.

Habitat - Butterfly Bush is native to China and Japan, but it has spread to various temperate regions worldwide. It thrives in a variety of habitats, including:

- **Disturbed Areas and Waste Ground:** Commonly found in disturbed soils, such as roadsides, railway embankments, and construction sites.
- **Riverbanks and Riparian Zones:** Can establish along riverbanks and stream edges, where it benefits from moist soils and can quickly spread.
- **Gardens and Urban Areas:** Frequently cultivated as an ornamental plant in gardens, parks, and urban landscapes due to its showy flowers and attractiveness to pollinators.

The plant grows well in well-drained soils, including sandy, loamy, and gravelly substrates, and prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade.

Status in Ireland - In Ireland, Butterfly Bush is considered a naturalised and invasive species, particularly in disturbed habitats, riparian areas, and urban environments.

It can outcompete native vegetation and colonise areas quickly due to its prolific seed production and ability to grow in poor soils.

Its invasiveness poses a threat to native biodiversity, especially in areas near rivers and streams.

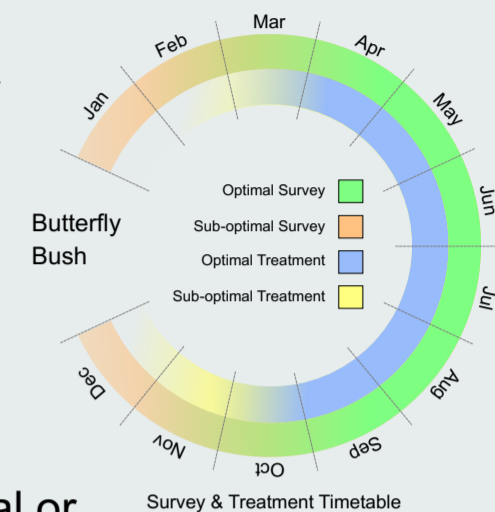
Reproduction and Spread - Butterfly Bush spreads primarily through seed production:

- **Seed Dispersal:** The small seeds are easily dispersed by wind and can travel long distances.
- **Vegetative Growth:** Although less common, the plant can also spread through stem cuttings if fragments come into contact with the soil.

Seedlings can establish quickly in disturbed soils and areas with bare ground.

Management and Control - Managing Butterfly Bush requires a combination of approaches to prevent its spread and remove established plants:

- **Mechanical Control:** Hand-pulling or digging up seedlings and young plants can be effective for small infestations. For larger shrubs, cutting or mowing followed by digging out the root system is necessary to prevent regrowth. Regular cutting or pruning can help reduce seed production.
- **Chemical Control:** Herbicides may be used to treat cut stumps or regrowth. Multiple applications may be required to achieve effective control, especially for large shrubs.
- **Preventative Measures:** Avoid planting Butterfly Bush near natural or semi-natural habitats and regularly deadhead flowers in gardens to prevent seed production. Consider replacing it with non-invasive, pollinator-friendly alternatives.



Ecological Impact - Butterfly Bush can have several ecological impacts in areas where it becomes established:

- **Competition with Native Species:** Can outcompete native plants, particularly in disturbed areas, reducing biodiversity.
- **Colonisation of Riparian Areas:** Its growth along riverbanks and streams can alter habitat structure, potentially impacting native riparian species and changing the dynamics of the ecosystem.
- **Wildlife Attraction:** While the flowers attract pollinators like butterflies, the plant's spread can displace other native plants that provide a more diverse range of ecological benefits.



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