

The Rise and Fall

of the Callery Pear

'Bradford', the first Callery pear (a tree native to China and Vietnam) cultivar, was released as a sterile, ornamental tree by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1964. Communities soon learned that the Bradford pear, although it had glossy, green leaves and an attractive shape, also had weak branches that tended to break apart in windstorms and under heavy snow loads. By the 1980s, more than 20 cultivars of the Callery pear had been developed in an attempt to increase the tree's lifespan, improve the branching pattern, or build resistance to different diseases. The multiple, new cultivars gave the trees the chance to cross-pollinate, and to escape the confines of sterility.



When the Callery pear was able to cross-pollinate, it began producing fertile, fruiting seeds, and escaped cultivation. Today, Callery pear trees can be seen taking over forest edges and abandoned fields. As they grow, these trees create a blanketing effect that chokes out native plant life. Desirable, native plants provide a variety of early spring food to pollinators like bees and butterflies; Callery pear's glossy leaves and stinky white flowers repel insect-eating birds. Birds that consume the small, soft fruit during the winter months suffer from nutritional deficiency when the Callery pear fruits are all they consume, plus the birds defecate the seeds as they fly or roost in trees or along power lines, thereby spreading the Callery pear into new areas.

The majority of Callery pear trees in Bloomington were planted in the 1980s. Nearly every storm that rolls through Bloomington causes at least one Callery pear limb failure, resulting in the expenditure of Bloomington's urban forestry resources on tree and limb cleanup and removal. The City has moved away from planting non-native cultivars on public land along city streets, and is replacing Callery pears on public land in a systematic way.

Photo by Rebekah D. Wallace,
University of Georgia, Bugwood.org



For more information about plans to address invasive Callery pears in Bloomington's urban forest, contact urban forester Haskell Smith by email at smithh@bloomington.in.gov. To learn more about what you can do about Callery pears on privately owned land, contact Monroe County Identify and Reduce Invasive Species, or MC-IRIS, at mc-iris.org.



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