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"Helping Others Grow"

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SMG's Grow Native!

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Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*) saying not much good about it other than it is, indeed, beautiful in fall. It seems only fair to provide some options to its growth if one is interested in stemming the tide of this invasive in our local gardens and its subsequent spread into our natural areas! So, in the ongoing series of "Plant This, Not That", I would like to propose an alternative that has lovely red fall color, which seems to be the overriding reason why we have so many *Euonymus alatus* planted.

The plant I am recommending for your consideration is Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), a deciduous native shrub found by the pioneers and growing from New Jersey to Florida and west to Missouri and west Texas. It was introduced into the horticultural trade in 1744. Cultivars of this native have been introduced only since 1982, which may explain why it is so little known and used in our landscapes. *Itea virginica* will grow in Zones 5 to 9 and varies in height depending on the cultivar chosen. It is pH adaptable, will grow in full sun to shade but flowers best and is fuller in shape in full sun, with adequate moisture. Once established, it is drought resistant. It can be grown as a single specimen or a hedge and the surprise is it is not just vibrant in the fall - it also sports showy flowers in late spring! These flowers are perfect, white, light-



Sweetspire 'Little Henry'

ly fragrant racemes and can be up to 6 inches in length. The flowers are borne on last year's wood so pruning should be avoided until after bloom - wait until June. The first cultivar introduced is known as

'Henry's Garnet', which can achieve a height of 6' and width of 9'. Too big for your garden, you say? To solve that problem a newer cultivar, 'Little Henry', has been introduced. 'Little Henry' has a nicely rounded form, 4 inch long flowers and a more compact height of 3 to 4 feet and width of about 5 feet. Pictured with this article is a specimen planted a year ago in my garden which has not yet attained its full potential.



Photo: Univ. of

Arkansas Extension

According to the Indiana Invasive Plant Council there are other native alternatives to Burning Bush; I have picked my favorite but you can read about the others on their web site, listed in the references here: Blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolium*); Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*); Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*); and Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

References:

- <https://growindiananatives.org/invasive-plants/top-ten-plants-to-avoid-and-alternatives/>
- <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/>
- "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants", Michael Dirr