

# Bradford Pear

## A STINKY INVASIVE

IMIR ROBINSON AND STEPHANIE GREEN

If you've ever noticed a tree bursting with white flowers in early spring and thought, "Wow, that's pretty!"—you might have been looking at a Bradford pear. But don't let its beauty fool you—this tree has a dark side.

### What's the Big Deal?

The Bradford pear (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Bradford') was introduced in the U.S. in the early 1900s as a fast-growing, ornamental tree. People loved its unique lollipop shape, bright fall colors, and ability to grow just about anywhere. It seemed like the perfect landscape tree—until we realized it was a major problem. Even though the Bradford pear was bred to be sterile and thornless, it can cross-pollinate with other varieties of Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), a highly invasive tree. When that happens, the trees produce small, seeded fruits that birds love to eat. The problem? Birds scatter those seeds everywhere, leading to dense, thorny thickets that crowd out native plants.

### Why Should You Care?

These wild-growing pear trees:

- Spread aggressively, taking over fields, roadsides, and forests
- Grow thorns up to 3-4 inches long—making them painful to remove
- Reduce biodiversity by pushing out native plants and trees

What started as a well-intentioned landscaping choice has turned into an environmental headache.



PHOTO CREDIT (TOP): DAN TENAGLIA, BUDWOOD  
PHOTO CREDIT (BOTTOM): JAMES H. MILLER, BUGWOOD

## What Can You Do?

**Remove and Manage** – If you have a Bradford pear, consider removing it before it can add to the spread of invasive Callery pears. The most effective way to do this is by cutting it down and removing the root system to prevent regrowth. If uprooting isn't possible, you can cut the tree and apply herbicide directly to the stump. The recommended options are glyphosate or triclopyr, which help prevent the tree from resprouting.

**Choose Native Alternatives** – Instead of Bradford pears, plant native trees that support local wildlife. Great options include:

- American fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) – Beautiful white fringe-like flowers
- Eastern dogwood (*Cornus florida*) – Iconic, with spring blossoms and fall berries
- Carolina silverbell (*Halesia carolina*) – Elegant, bell-shaped flowers
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.) – White flowers in spring, edible berries in summer

**Stop the Spread** – If you see a wild-growing Callery pear sapling, remove it before it can take over.

**Spread the Word** – Many homeowners and landscapers don't realize the harm these trees cause. Share this info with your community!

**Map it if you see it on ACC parks or natural areas** – Use the [EDDMaps](#) web-based mapping system to document where you saw it. This is a great community science tool that can be downloaded on your phone. Your mapped location of Bradford pears will help us work toward removing them from Athen's natural areas.

The Bradford pear may be beautiful, but it's time we stop planting trouble. Let's work together to keep our local landscapes healthy and diverse!



PHOTO CREDIT: BRITT SLATTERY, BUDWOOD

[FOR SOURCES AND TO LEARN MORE CLICK HERE!](#)