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## Flowering Tree: Friend or Foe

Spring flowers are a highlight across landscapes and along roadsides. Flowering trees are a large portion of this display. While all of them may be beautiful, some are more problematic than others. Bradford pear is the big white puffball of a tree that blooms in spring... or late winter, if the weather is unseasonably warm.

The name "Bradford" is actually just a specific variety of this tree. The common name is Callery pear, from the Latin *Pyrus calleryana*. It's beautiful blooms lead to a very popular and commonly planted tree. However, while Bradford was initially supposed to be fruitless, it has become very fruitful. This is the root of the problem, and this tree has many problems.

The problems are as follows, from biggest to smallest: fruit spreading leads to widespread encroachment, poor structure causes frequent breakage, and many people think the blooms smell bad. Now, these are all problems worth discussion, but the first two may cause ecological, financial, or structural harm.

Invasive species are non-native organisms that are well adapted and proliferate easily. Callery pear fits the bill perfectly, and it can be seen in fields and pastures around the country. Several states list it as an invasive species or have state programs to address it. In 2027, the sale and transport of this tree will be limited in Kansas, per the Department of Agriculture.

The second big flaw, tree breakage, affects anyone with a tree in their landscape. Callery pear has a rounded shape with dense branches, which lend to its impressive floral display. However, there is a reason most shade trees have a single, strong trunk. That type of growth, called excurrent, leads to branches with a better ability to withstand load. It also leads to the majority of foliage, which catches the wind, being lower in the canopy. A tree like callery pear, with decurrent growth, has poorly structured branches that catch a lot of wind. The sharp angles lead to easily cleaved branches, and once one goes down, an entire wedge can be empty.

There are many other, less problematic, flowering trees. The native redbud is an excellent specimen for spring color, as well as the crab apple. Their colors range from white to pink to purple. Dogwood is another native tree with great spring flowers and fall color to boot!

A plant isn't usually called a problem until it becomes a big problem. If they're still in bloom, you can view the escaped callery pear trees along the highway.

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