

## Pause for Plants March

### Who Let the Pears Out?

You've probably noticed attractive "pear shaped" white flowered trees blooming in many locations in early spring. They're a pear variety called "Bradford", with the scientific name *Pyrus calleryana*. They were developed about 40 years ago as an "ideal" tree for urban areas. Advantages which have made Bradford pears popular include: low cost, fast growth, nice shape, attractive spring flowering habit, and attractive fall leaf color. Bradfords are still being planted for these reasons.



Young Bradford Pears, "disposable" trees doing their best to add some spring blossoms interest to "disposable" mobile homes.

So why would the Sierra Club call them "Frankenstein Trees" and North Carolina State Cooperative Extension say they are "a mixed blessing in the landscape? It's because over the years some definite problems with these trees have occurred, and they include:

1. Branches grow from one point at the tip of the trunk, making trees top heavy as they grow, and easily split, often in half, by wind.
2. When damaged trees are removed, roots produce tough thorny shoots, which are difficult to remove. Bradford Pear trees are produced by grafting the shapely variety onto a thorny tree rootstock, which is grown from seed.
3. Their lovely white flowers have a really foul smell, yet pollinators flock to it!
4. Originally bred as sterile, trees have hybridized and are producing fruit and seed. The pears are about the size of a small marble, and grow in clusters. They're brown when ripe in late summer. Birds like them, so the seeds get "pooped" about. But, Squirrels like the seeds of unripe fruit, so they may provide some control of their spread.
5. Because of over planting, VERY THORNY thickets of Bradford Pear "offspring" are invading natural areas.



A thicket of thorny Bradford Pears.



One Bradford Pear's treacherous thorns.

I've been particularly interested in Bradford's potential as an invasive species, and have recently documented both their ability to produce fruit and seed and spread to natural areas all over Abbeville, Greenwood, Greenville, and Pickens counties. So I hope you'll want to help reverse this trend by practicing and encouraging others to practice the following:

1. Avoid planting Bradford pears.
2. Remove them from your property
3. Plant native species of trees that also have beautiful white spring blossoms. These include Dogwood trees, with disease resistant varieties now available, and Red Bud trees, with a striking White variety for sale. Also with lovely spring blooms are Serviceberry and Fringe tree also known as Grancy Grey Beard. Even non-native Japanese Flowering Cherries are a better choice. Ask for these at your favorite nurseries. Help produce more demand for them and less for Bradford pears. You will be doing Mother Nature a favor.