

# Conservation Corner

By Corinne Peterson  
Pocahontas County Naturalist



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“There, the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.” Exodus 3:2

Last weekend, as we crossed the state to visit our daughter’s family in the Quad Cities, it seemed as if the entire state was on fire yet did not burn up. Along the Des Moines, Cedar, and Iowa river valleys, the red oaks still painted vivid splashes of brilliance among the fading colors of the ashes, oaks, and walnuts. Likewise, on farmsteads and in towns, the burning bush sang “crimson and clover over and over” in landscape plantings along the way. Like Moses in the wilderness, let’s encounter the burning bush today.



*Euonymus alatus* is a deciduous shrub native to central and northern China, Japan, and Korea. While most commonly called a burning bush, it is also known as the winged spindle or winged euonymus. If you’ve looked carefully at this bush, you may have noticed their “winged” branches, four ridges that develop from the cork cambium in the first year of each twig’s growth. In fact, the species name *alatus* is Latin for “winged.”

The leaves of the burning bush are rather small,  $\frac{3}{4}$  -  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, but make up for their minor size in their major purplish-red fall color. In contrast, its non-showy flowers are greenish in color and appear over a long period in the spring. The fruit is also showy, a red aril enclosed by a four-lobed pink, yellow, or orange capsule.

Due to its bright fruit and leaf color, the burning bush is a popular ornamental plant in gardens, parks, and home landscapes. While some varieties may grow up to 20 feet tall and just as wide, there are many cultivars that are more compact in their growth.

Unfortunately, like many non-native plants, the burning bush is now listed as an invasive species in 21 states. First introduced in the United States in the 1860s, the burning bush has escaped cultivation and become invasive mostly in the woodlands of New England, and its sale is prohibited in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine. So far, planting burning bushes in foundation plantings is usually not a problem.

Did you know that in traditional Chinese medicine, the burning bush is known as Gui Jian Yu and is used to treat blood disorders, remove toxic materials, subside swelling, and kill insects or parasites?

On a more subdued note, I’ll close with Robert Frost’s poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” in memory of Dr. Daniel Fullerton, Pastor of the Pomeroy Covenant Church, who died suddenly last week. We will miss him.

Nature’s first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf’s a flower; But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf. So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day. Nothing gold can stay.

