Thousands of plants have been introduced to the United States from other parts of the world. Some have come here accidentally in seed stock, while others were brought here intentionally for horticultural use. A small number of these introduced plants have gotten a little too comfortable in their new environment. Because they have no native predators and produce a lot of fruit and seed that are efficiently dispersed, they are invading natural areas. The aggressiveness of these invasive plants affects natural areas and wildlife by decreasing biodiversity, competing with native and rare plants and eliminating wildlife habitat and food sources.

**Plant This, Not That** features a list of native alternatives to a commonly used landscape plant that has become invasive. The alternatives were chosen because their characteristics—form, flowers, fruit or fall color—are similar to that of the invasive and fulfill the same landscaping need. On a broader scale, native plants help create a healthier ecosystem, attract a greater diversity of wildlife and may minimize the need for fertilizers and pesticides.

**The Invasive**

*Ligustrum vulgare* (European Privet)

In the horticultural realm, privets are grown almost exclusively as hedges. When pruned, these fast-growing shrubs from the Olive family remain dense and bushy. Their small, ovate leaves conceal the effects of the pruning and fill in gaps. Root suckers often form and help to further fill out the hedge. Due to these habits, privets seem almost predestined to become "the world's most perfect hedge plant," aside from one major flaw: they are invasive in eastern and midwestern North America. Their shiny, blue-black berries are dispersed by birds and other animals, allowing the shrub to invade new areas. Privet is not picky about where it grows, tolerating a variety of light and soil conditions. In Ohio, you can see privet invading old fields, bottomland forests, roadways, and even closed canopy forests. Once established, privets form dense, thickets that shade out smaller, native plants. Their leaves, which unfurl earlier than the leaves of native plants, are poisonous to wildlife, which protects the plant from herbivores giving it a competitive advantage over native plants.

**The Native Alternatives**

**Aronia arbutifolia** (Red chokeberry)

Red chokeberry, hardy to Zone 4, does better planted in informal hedgerows than in highly-manicured formal hedges, which is a good thing as less pruning allows this fetching shrub to show off its namesake red berries. Growing to a maximum height of 10 feet and a width of six feet, chokeberry is as attractive to wildlife as it is to the human eye. The small, white flowers bloom in mid-spring, attracting bees and butterflies, while the bright green leaves begin to unfurl. Red, glossy fruits develop by late summer and are quite astringent, even for birds. The berries become more palatable for the birds after a few frosts, meaning that the plant holds onto its berries throughout the fall and into the winter, long after its leaves have changed to a brilliant crimson and fallen. As mentioned, red chokeberries do well as mass plantings and hedgerows, but also look great planted amongst larger trees with contrasting features, such as evergreens. Chokeberries thrive in full sun or partial shade with acidic soils. They can tolerate wet or dry soils, but dislike highly alkaline soils. Cutting back old shoots on established plants and allowing root suckers to grow encourages regeneration and allows the plants to really fill in. Pruning should be done in late winter to achieve the desired shape. The cultivar ‘Brilliantissima’ is recommended for its more compact form and larger, glossier fruits. ‘Brilliantissima’ grows to a height of 6-8 feet and a spread of 3-5 feet.

**Cornus racemosa** (Gray dogwood)

While stunning flowering dogwood and red-stemmed red osier dogwood often steal the show throughout the year, there is a quiet beauty to gray dogwood that is not to be overlooked. Hardy to Zone 3, this 10-15 foot tall shrub bears attractive, oval-shaped leaves and forms domed clusters of small, white flowers. Flowers give way to pearly white berries perched atop bright red stalks, creating a striking contrast especially against the backdrop of green leaves, which change to a deep red—almost burgundy—in the fall. Gray dogwood does well on its own or planted in groups as in a hedge. Plant it in average to rich soils, in full sun or partial shade. Once established, gray dogwood is one of the most adaptable plants around, handling a wide range of moisture regimes, from droughts to intermittent sogginess. Gray dogwood also tends to send up suckers and easily regenerates after old clumps have been cut. ‘Huron’ gray dogwood, a Lake County Nursery introduction, is a recommended cultivar for its dense, compact round form, which works great as a small hedge. ‘Huron’ can grow to a height of 6-8 feet with a 6-8 foot spread.

**Check out Holden’s horticultural bulletin on hedge pruning online at** [http://www.holdenarb.org/resources/horticulture-bulletins.asp](http://www.holdenarb.org/resources/horticulture-bulletins.asp).