SPECIES COMMON NAME:

Orange-eye Butterfly Bush

SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Buddleja davidii

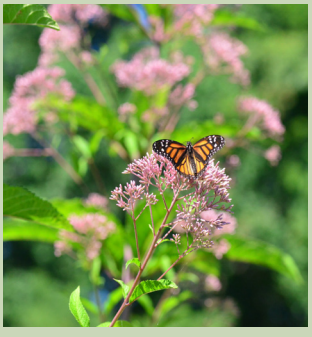
Threat

Orange-eye butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*) is a shrub frequently planted in ornamental landscaping due to its showy purple blooms and tendency to attract butterflies. However, this plant has increasingly been found escaping from places it has been planted and invading natural areas in Virginia and neighboring states. In addition, while orange-eye butterfly bush may attract pollinators, it is not a larval host plant for any species of butterfly or moth in North America. It has also been found to have less nutritional value for pollinators than native plant species.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

Virginia is home to many native species that are just as beautiful as orange-eye butterfly bush that provide habitat for pollinators and do not damage ecosystems. The various kinds of native **Joe-Pye-weed** (*Eutrochium spp.*) attract plenty of butterflies and also act as a host plant for many species. The same can be said for **ironweed** (*Vernonia spp.*), **milkweed** (*Asclepias spp.*), and **blazing star** (*Liatris spp.*) species. Shrubs such as **buttonbush** (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), **New Jersey tea** (*Ceanothus americanus*), or **false indigo-bush** (*Amorpha fruticosa*) would also make excellent alternatives.

Joe-pye-weed



Common milkweed

Report Sightings

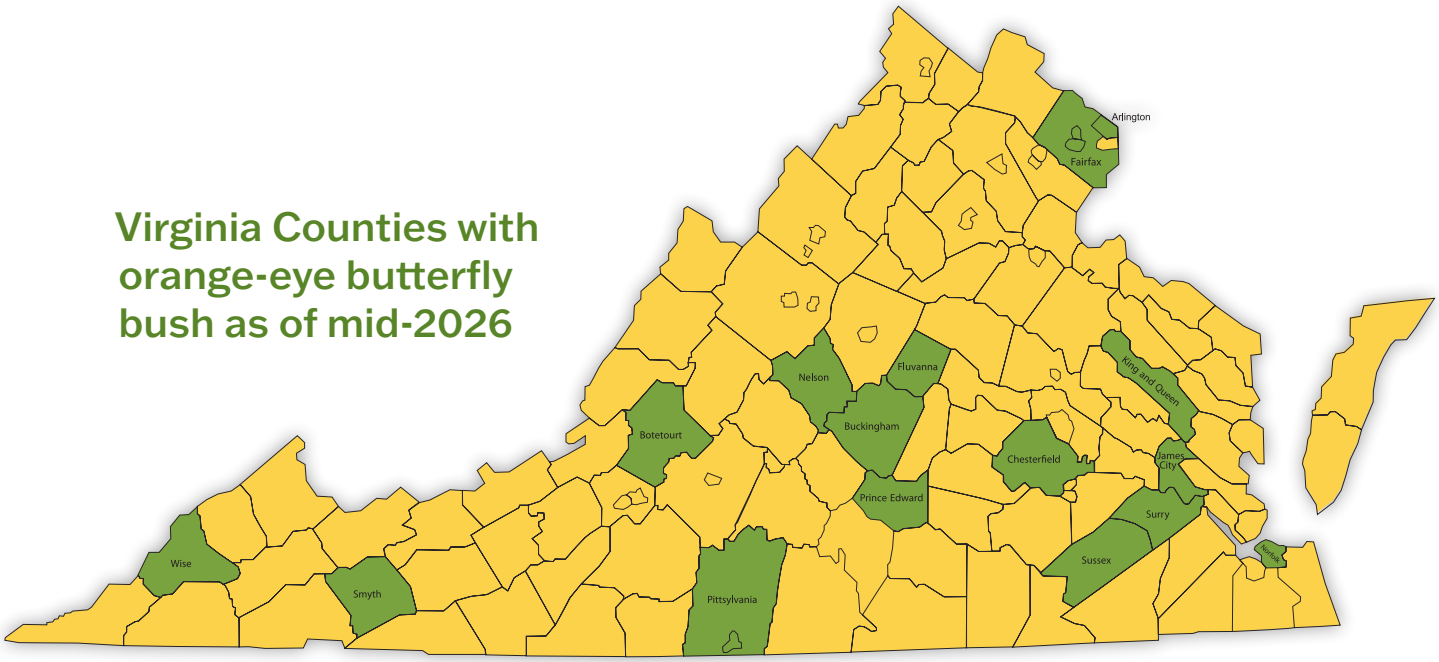
If you believe you have found a wild occurrence of orange-eye butterfly bush, you can assist in conservation efforts by reporting your findings. Collect complete location information including coordinates if possible. Take clear photos of the plant from a distance and up close. Detailed images of leaves, flowers, seed and bark are particularly helpful. Reports can be emailed directly to **invasive.species@dcr.virginia.gov** or reported online through the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS). Reports can also be made on a smartphone using the free EDDMapS or iNaturalist apps.

Description

Orange-eye butterfly bush is a woody shrub often reaching heights of 10 feet or more, with long, opposite and distinctly arching branches. The lance-shaped leaves measure 8-10 inches long and have serrated edges, distinct veins and culminate in a sharp point. Leaf tops are green, while the undersides are whitish and hairy. In the summer, fragrant flowers appear as dense, long, conical clusters along a central stem. They are purple, pink or white in color and often have an orange center, giving the plant its common name. Following pollination, these flowers will turn into brown seed pods. Each cluster of pods can produce an estimated 40,000 miniscule seeds which are easily dispersed by wind.

INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES OF VIRGINIA

Virginia Counties with orange-eye butterfly bush as of mid-2026



Distribution

Orange-eye butterfly bush was introduced into North America around 1900, and wild growing specimens were collected in Virginia as early as 1950.

In the Commonwealth, this plant is most commonly found in riparian areas or other wet open areas. However, it can also invade forest edges and disturbed areas such as railroads, mined lands and roads. While it shows a preference for full sun and moist soil, it can tolerate various soil types and some shade.

Control

For small invasions, manual control may be successful. Dig or pull up all plants and ensure the roots are removed. This is easier when soil is moist or with use of weed wrench style tools.

Larger invasions will likely require herbicide. For more information on chemical control, contact your local cooperative extension agent or area forester.

In locations where butterfly bush cannot be removed, the flower clusters should be cut, bagged, and responsibly disposed of before seeds form to prevent unwanted spread.

Photo credits:

Gary P. Fleming *Buddleja davidii*

Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, Bugwood.org

Richard Gardner, Bugwood.org

David L. Clement, University of Maryland, Bugwood.org

Gary P. Fleming *Asclepias syriaca*

TO REPORT A SIGHTING:

DCR Invasive Species Team
invasive.species@dcr.virginia.gov

Online mapping and reporting tool:
http://eddmaps.org

Smartphone apps: **iNaturalist, EDDMapS**

SOURCES

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