

Best of the Bunch

*The species' aggressive reputation notwithstanding, a plethora of *Buddleja* cultivars offer gardeners a range of colors, forms and bloom periods.*

Known for its showy blooms and ability to attract butterflies, *Buddleja* (butterfly bush) is a summer garden favorite. Gardeners enjoy the ease with which the plant can be grown, the range of available flower colors and the long bloom period.

The popularity of butterfly bush throughout the past hundred years has enticed garden enthusiasts, breeders and hybridizers to select and name an increasing number of cultivars. Each selection claims to have greater appeal than the last. Some boast enhanced flower color and increased inflorescence size, while others tout an improved form and more attractive foliage.

Even though *B. davidii* has become known in parts of the US and abroad as an invasive plant (see "Beware of Butterfly Bush" in the July 15, 2001, issue), the popularity of its cultivars persists, as demonstrated by their continued naming and marketing. For this reason, those who cannot bear to part with their beloved butterfly bushes should take action to inhibit seed dispersal.

Carefully deadheading and cutting back shrubs in fall eliminates seed before its maturation. By undertaking this simple preventive maintenance, one can, with a clear conscience, enjoy butterfly bush. But with the plethora of new cultivars having been added to the list of old favorites, deciding which one to choose for your client's garden can be difficult indeed!

So many choices. While the genus *Buddleja* contains approximately 100 recognized species hailing from such diverse places as Asia, Africa and North and South America, many cultivars are selections from the hardier species, such as *B. alternifolia*, *B. davidii*, *B. fallowiana* and *B. globosa*. Commonly, *Buddleja* selections are recognizable by their butterfly-attracting flowers displayed in panicles.

Blooming peaks for most cultivars in early summer, then continues through fall. Inflorescence lengths vary from cultivar to cultivar, as does bloom color, the flower's throat color, the presence or absence of fragrance and the attractiveness of maturing seed heads. While it is not necessary to deadhead *Buddleja* to continue summer blooming, it may improve late season appearance and is a recommended practice for reducing

the plant's ability to seed-in, which is beneficial from maintenance and invasive-plant prevention perspectives.

As for foliage, *Buddleja* varieties characteristically have lanceolate leaves that range in color from light to dark green and often have a silvery accent. They also range in level of serration and size. Lastly, in order to keep these shrubs to a manageable size and keep their form appealing, it is recommended the plants be pruned back hard annually.

Put to the test. There are myriad appealing characteristics available among the many *Buddleja* varieties on the market today. So which is the best butterfly bush of the bunch? In an attempt to help answer this question, Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, PA — which has tested more than 1,200 taxa of shrubs throughout the past six years — has undertaken the evaluation of more than 50 commercially available *Buddleja* selections.

Three specimens of each *Buddleja* variety studied were planted in full sun in an open field, and every 12-foot-wide test plot was mulched and separated by 8-foot-wide strips of turf. Minimal plant maintenance, such as occasional weeding, and care, such as watering on an as-

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needed basis during the first growing season, were provided in a manner similar to that which would be expected by the average homeowner. Once established, the plants were cut back to about 1 foot to 1½ feet and allowed to regrow anew each year. It is notable that because *B. alternifolia* flowers on the previous season's growth, these plants were pruned after blooming in early summer.

The purpose of this experiment was to identify which butterfly bushes have the greatest inherent visual appeal throughout the year while being reliably hardy in southeastern Pennsylvania (Zone 6).

In order to decide which varieties have the best appearance, Longwood Gardens collected data and evaluated plants year-round. A total of 25 people, with varying degrees of gardening experience, participated in the evaluation process throughout the duration of the trials. Evaluators were classified into three groups: students training at Longwood Gardens, volunteers and horticulture professionals. While all students (comprising the largest group) held a professed interest in horticulture, their levels of horticultural training varied from basic through having completed university degree programs. Longwood Gardens' volunteers were similar in that they displayed an interest in horticulture; however, they were community members with little to no horticultural training. The category of horticulture professionals, the smallest group, included Longwood Gardens staff, as well as visiting guests from other horticulturally related institutions.

All of the evaluators were asked to comment, subjectively and to the best of their abilities, on each plant's size, growth habit, stems, foliage, flowers and fruit, as well as injuries caused by pests, pathogens and environmental stresses. Finally, evaluators gave each cultivar or species an overall rating. This rating scale ranged from 1, for unacceptable appearance, through 5, for best appearance. The scores awarded during the growing season of June through November were then averaged in order to rank the plants against each other.

The complete results of the trials, including the final rating of each selection, are summarized in the table on page 46. Even though evaluators did give some selections ratings of 5 during the height of the season, the reason why no selections have overall ratings above 3.8 is because of the inclusion of typically lower early and late season ratings in the averages. The top-performing butterfly bush selections are herein discussed in further detail.

Pleasing purple. One of the most important factors often used for choosing a plant is its flower color. For this reason, data from the trials have been broken down into color categories. Among the *Buddleja* studied, most have blooms in a shade of purple. The best performing of the 19 purple-flowering selections in the trials are *B. davidii* 'Nanho Purple', *B. davidii* 'Border Beauty' and *B. davidii* 'African Queen'.



Buddleja davidii 'Nanho Purple' features vibrant flowers, dark green foliage and purple young stems.

The eye-catching, dark purple blooms of 'Nanho Purple' have orange throats and are densely packed onto short inflorescences. It also features an attractive purple cast on both flower buds and young stems. Overall, the 6-foot tall and wide stature, round form and dense dark green foliage combine with the purple accents to make this a very handsome cultivar.

'African Queen' also has a round, dense growth habit and dark green leaves. The end-of-season size of the plant is about 6 feet tall and almost as wide. Its inflorescences are not as dark as those of 'Nanho Purple', but they are longer, reaching up to 10 inches. Blooms are followed by appealingly dark maroon to brown maturing seed heads.

Even larger inflorescences are dis-

played by 'Border Beauty'. Bright and showy, the purple flowering panicles can reach 11 inches, making them heavy enough to cause branches of this 6- by 6-foot shrub to become slightly weepy. Maroon seed heads develop in late August and complement the October blooms. Whether producing short or long panicles, each of these cultivars creates an outstanding splash of summertime purple color.

Pretty in pink. In the pink-flowering category, *B. davidii* 'Fascination', *B. davidii* 'Summer Beauty' and *B. davidii* 'Pink Delight' top the list of the 10 selections in the trial. Reaching 9 feet tall and almost as wide with a pleasing and densely foliated round form, 'Fascination' boasts correlating, long inflorescences of pink lavender blossoms that can surpass 1½ feet long. The profuse blooming begins in early July, and the many inflorescences mature into long seed heads that turn golden and weep gracefully over the plant.

'Summer Beauty' has bright pink to magenta flowers that look lovely displayed next to its silvery white young stem tips and gray-green leaves. Its round, dense and tidy growth habit remains appealing all season long, and the

Results of *Buddleja* trials at Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, PA, in order of rating

Name	Rating	Comments
Purple varieties		
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Nanho Purple'	3.6	Appealing, full, round and dense form; new purple stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Border Beauty'	3.5	Large inflorescences; good form and habit
<i>B. davidii</i> 'African Queen'	3.3	Dark purple flowers; young purple stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Ile de France'	3.1	Long, lavender-purple inflorescences; upright habit slightly arching in autumn
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Monum'	3.0	Dark purple flowers; round, dense habit; 3-inch long, slender leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Dartmoor'	2.9	Large, pendulous inflorescences; silver accent on leaf undersides and new stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Orchid'	2.9	Fragrant, lavender flowers; long inflorescences
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Orchid Beauty'	2.9	Light lavender flowers; long inflorescences
<i>B. alternifolia</i> 'Argentea'	2.9	Lavender flowers; weeping habit; fine-textured leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Charming'	2.8	Arching habit becomes sprawling late season
<i>B. lindleyana</i> 'Miss Vicie'	2.8	Long, thin, pendulous, nonshowy inflorescences; small, glossy, dark green leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Purple Prince'	2.7	Slightly lighter purple flowers than those of 'Potter's Purple'
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Black Knight'	2.6	Darkest purple flowers in the trials; unappealing growth habit
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Burgundy'	2.6	Large inflorescences; untidy habit by midsummer
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Violet Message'	2.6	Fragrant flowers; long inflorescences; arching habit; branches have tendency to fall
<i>B. hemsleyana</i>	2.6	Sparse flowers; small leaves; orange-brown stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Potter's Purple'	2.5	Dark purple flowers; long inflorescences; large leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Dubonnet'	2.4	Dark purple flowers; open, unkempt habit in autumn
<i>B. venenifera</i>	2.4	Blooms late July; small, narrow leaves
Pink varieties		
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Fascination'	3.5	Long inflorescences; attractive form; silvery white new stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Summer Beauty'	3.5	Good form all season long; young silvery stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Pink Delight'	3.3	Inflorescences longer than 'Fascination' with bright, rosy pink color; upright, rounded habit
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Bonnie'	3.2	Unattractive spent flowers; striped stems
<i>B. nivea</i> subsp. <i>yunnanensis</i>	3.0	Exceptionally large in stature, foliage and inflorescence; nonshowy bloomer
<i>B. forrestii</i>	2.8	Pinkish lavender flowers loosely spaced on long inflorescences
<i>B. xpikei</i> 'Hever'	2.7	Fine-textured, mint green leaves; new silvery stems; striped and exfoliating mature stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Raspberry Wine'	2.7	Pink-magenta flowers; unappealing low-spreading habit; much dieback; small leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Royal Red'	2.5	Red-purple flowers; untidy form and habit; new stems white with a purple cast
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Harlequin'	2.2	Small, nonvigorous; leaf variegation constantly reverting to green
Blue varieties		
<i>B. 'Ellen's Blue'</i>	3.8	Prolific bloomer; round, tight habit; new silvery white stems
<i>B. 'Lochinch'</i>	3.7	Nice, uniformly round habit; fuzzy, silvery white stems that tan with age
<i>B. 'Glasnevin Blue'</i>	3.2	Prolific blooms; good form through summer; fine-textured, silvery gray-green leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Mongo'	3.0	Small leaves and inflorescences yield fine-textured appearance; silvery white new stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Empire Blue'	2.9	Sprawling habit late in the year; glossy, burgundy-brown mature stems
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Nanho Blue'	2.8	Unattractive spent flowers; fine-textured leaves
White varieties		
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Monite'	3.8	Pure white flowers on long inflorescences; peak bloom a little later than most other varieties
<i>B. davidii</i> 'White Bouquet'	3.2	Large inflorescences; canopy of dense, dark green leaves; good form
<i>B. davidii</i> 'White Ball'	3.1	Prolific, long inflorescences above foliage; dense leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'Peace'	3.0	Prolific inflorescences; dense, narrow, gray-green leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'White Profusion'	2.9	Similar to 'White Bouquet', with shorter inflorescences, also less outstanding
<i>B. davidii</i> var. <i>nanhonensis</i> 'Nanho Alba'	2.8	Many large, long inflorescences; narrow, gray-green leaves
<i>B. davidii</i> 'White Harlequin'	2.7	Variegated leaves with creamy white margins that tend to revert to solid green
<i>B. davidii</i> 'White Spread'	2.3	Small inflorescences; late bloom time; low, open, spreading habit; large leaves
Yellow varieties		
<i>B. xweyeriana</i> *	3.3	Ball-shaped inflorescences; more floriferous than other yellow varieties; irregular habit
<i>B. xweyeriana</i> 'Honeycomb'	3.0	Tight, ball-shaped flower clusters; large, textured leaves
<i>B. xweyeriana</i> 'Sungold'	2.9	Dense, medium green leaves; mature striped stems
<i>B. xweyeriana</i> **	2.7	Very small inflorescences; unattractive spent flowers and seed heads
<i>B. xweyeriana</i> 'Golden Glow'	2.4	Mixture of orange and purple flower colors not necessarily attractive; small inflorescences
<i>B. xweyeriana</i> 'Moonlight'	2.1	Late bloom time; poor growth habit; large, coarsely serrated leaves; fuzzy, white stems
Purple-and-white varieties		
<i>B. davidii</i> '3 in One'	3.0	Light purple, dark purple and white flowers; perceived as looking strange and unnatural

Note: The following cultivars did not bloom in the trials and/or failed to establish: *B. davidii* 'Fortune', *B. davidii* 'Moonshadow', *B. davidii* 'Opera', *B. davidii* 'Summer Rose', *B. fallowiana*, *B. globosa*, *B. macrostachya*, *B. nivea* subsp. *nivea* and *B. salviifolia*.

* from Carolina Nurseries, Moncks Corner, SC

** from Arborvillage Farm Nursery, Holt, MO

plant finishes the season at an easily manageable size of 5 feet tall and wide. 'Summer Beauty' also has attractive brown seed heads by early autumn.

'Pink Delight' is truly delightful with inflorescences that are even longer and larger than those of 'Fascination'. The flashy pink blooms are noticeable even from afar, while the narrow, dark green leaves blend to form an overall dense, upright and rounded 7- by 7-foot plant. These three cultivars were awarded high ratings in the trials for form and flower color.

Blue beauties. While pink and purple blooms are common and perhaps too mundane for some gardeners, blue-flowering plants can be dazzling and different. *B. 'Ellen's Blue'*, *B. 'Lochinch'* and *B. 'Glasnevin Blue'* are the best blue-blooming beauties from the six in the trials. 'Ellen's Blue' has prolific inflorescences that cover the entire 7- by 7-foot plant in a robe of vibrant color. The gray-green foliage has silvery undersides, and young stems are white and fuzzy. The plant has an overall clean habit that is rounded, dense and regular.

'Glasnevin Blue' has a habit similar to that of 'Ellen's Blue', but its smaller leaves and inflorescences and thinner stems give 'Glasnevin Blue' a finer texture and daintier feel to it. Its 3-inch-long inflorescences boast pale blue flowers with orange throats and are held close against the 8- by 8-foot round and dense canopy of gray-green leaves. Black seed heads form in August.

'Lochinch' has an appealingly dense and uniformly round growth habit, reaching a stately end-of-season size of 8 feet tall and wide. The blue lavender flowers with orange throats cover the plant from top to bottom during peak bloom in early August. They are displayed on short inflorescences and have a pleasant fragrance. Foliage is silvery gray-green. While similar, these three blue-flowering cultivars are individually notable and received excellent ratings in the trials.

Wondrous white. Among the eight white-flowering cultivars in the trials, three proved outstanding: *B. davidii* 'Monite', *B. davidii* 'White Bouquet' and *B. davidii* 'White Ball'. The narrow, medium green leaves of 'Monite' create a 5-foot tall and 4-foot wide, dense, round and full canopy throughout the entire growing season. The plant's beautiful habit is accented by 1-foot-long inflorescences of clean, white, fragrant flowers. Blooming peaks in early August, attracting many butterflies and moths.



Buddleja davidii 'Pink Delight' has an upright and round habit accented by extremely long panicles of pink flowers.



Buddleja davidii 'Border Beauty' has an upright habit early in the season but becomes more open as the inflorescences cause the branches to weep.

The long inflorescences of 'White Bouquet' also peak in early August and feature small, white blooms that are particularly attractive. Flowers seem to explode forth from the dense canopy by being held above the dark green foliage of this 8-foot wide and tall rounded plant. Golden seed heads are held above the canopy as well.

Featuring a round and dense canopy, 'White Ball' lives up to its name by having a compact, tidy and spherical form that reaches 5 feet tall and wide. This ball is composed of small, silvery gray-green leaves that create an excellent background for the white flowers. Blooms are densely arranged on prolific inflorescences measuring more than 1 foot long, which are held close against the canopy. Many long seed heads follow, emerging a green-brown and maturing to a golden hue. These three cultivars offer appealing growth habits and gorgeous displays of prolific white blooms.

Low-rated yellow. Competition in the yellow category was not quite as strong since there have been fewer yellow-flowering cultivars developed. All yellow-flowering plants in the trials are selections of *B. xweyeriana*, a hybrid of *B. davidii* and *B. globosa*. Due to its hybrid parentage, *B. xweyeriana* boasts individual rounded flower clusters along the length of its inflorescences rather than the typical conical inflorescences seen on most *Buddleja* selections. Overall, the yellow-flowering selections are all very similar and, as a group, received slightly lower ratings than plants in the other color categories.

Interestingly, the named cultivars, which differ mainly by slight variations in flower color, did not perform significantly better than the unnamed hybrids in the trials. Furthermore, the highest rated yellow-flowering plant is an unnamed selection of *B. xweyeriana* originally grown by Carolina Nurseries, Moncks Corner, SC. This selection's

golden yellow blooms form tight, spherical balls on 6- to 8-inch-long panicles. They are set over a background of dark green leaves with silvery undersides that create a canopy of medium density.

The plant's growth habit is generally upright, reaching 8 feet tall and about 6 feet wide, but there was irregularity in overall shape among the specimens tested. Carolina Nurseries no longer carries this selection. But because all of the yellow-flowering plants are similar, *B. xweyeriana* 'Honeycomb' and *B. xweyeriana* 'Sungold', the second and third highest rated yellow-flowering plants in the trials, may be just as desirable selections.

Best of the bunch. Through the multiple-year trials of more than 50 selections of butterfly bush, Longwood Gardens has determined that these 13 purple, pink, blue, white and yellow selections are the best of the bunch. Not only are they reliably hardy, they all have good growth habits and impressive flower displays. Furthermore, all of these cultivars require little maintenance to achieve these desirable attributes. Each of these *Buddleja* varieties is sure to catch the eyes of visiting butterflies and garden guests alike.

For a list of suppliers of the plants listed in this article, see *Re:Sources* in the Sept. 1 issue.

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