



Delegate Linda Foley
Maryland House of Delegates
and
Senator Ben Brooks
Maryland State Senate
HB979/SB915
FAVORABLE

February 26, 2024

Dear Delegate Foley and Senator Brooks:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for banning the sale of invasive plants in the state of Maryland. I have been studying the effects of landscaping with non-native plants over the past 20 years from my position at the University of Delaware as well as the impact invasive plants have had on local ecosystems. To cut to the chase, the impacts have been devastating on biodiversity at all trophic levels. As much as 80% of the landscape plants in residential and public landscapes are now non-native ornamental plants, largely from Asia. Many species, such as Callery pear, burning bush, autumn olive, Norway maple, porcelainberry, privet, Amur honeysuckle, Japanese honeysuckle, multiflora rose, oriental bittersweet, and many more have escaped cultivation in our yards and invaded natural areas, displacing native flora and the animals it supports. Even the species that are not invasive are now the first trophic level, the plants supplying energy to local food webs, in 135 million acres of residential landscapes throughout the U.S.

And that is the problem; non-native plants are poor at passing the energy they have harnessed from the sun on to animals. No energy, no animals. No animals, no ecosystem! This is particularly true of insects, the little things that run the world (Wilson 1987). Quite simply, without insects, terrestrial ecosystems would collapse in months, with little surviving such collapses, including humans. To give you figures from just one of our studies, agricultural hedgerows invaded by autumn olive, multiflora rose, Amur honey suckle, and oriental bittersweet support 96% less caterpillar biomass than hedgerows comprised primarily of native plants (Richard et al. 2018). That is 96% less bird food in these invaded habitats.

Our reliance on non-native plants is encouraging the biodiversity crisis and the 6th great extinction event the earth has ever experienced. North America has already lost 3 billion breeding birds and 45% of it is insects. The U.N. predicts that we will lose 1 million species to extinction in the next 20 years if we don't provide the basics: a place to live and something to

eat. Thus, the native plant movement, and legislation to ban the sale of plants we already know are highly invasive. There is no reason why we cannot increase the percentage of productive native plants in our landscapes. The notion that restricting sales of invasive plants will put nurserymen out of business is nonsense. If we put more plants in our landscapes, we will boost the nursery industry, not restrict it.

The public supports the transition from ecologically unproductive non-native plants to productive natives. It now recognizes that plants are more than decorations, and that the future of conservation is going to happen on private property and will be conducted by private citizens. Today the demand for native plants far outstrips the supply. Coordinated state support of native plant growers would help bridge this gap and lead the way to 21st century landscaping. The transition to native plants is happening across the nation and Maryland could be a leader with a state supported Native Plant Program and a ban on the sale of invasives.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas W. Tallamy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Douglas W. Tallamy
T.A. Baker professor of Agriculture

* Richard, M., D.W. Tallamy and A. Mitchell. 2018. Introduced plants reduce species interactions. *Biological Invasions* 21(3): 983-992.

* Wilson, E.O. 1987. The little things that run the world (The importance and conservation invertebrates). *Conservation Biology* 1: 344-346.