



Butterfly Bush

(*Buddleja-davidii*)

MEDIUM RISK

Common Names: Summer lilac, Orange eye, David's buddleja, Black Knight

Family: Scrophulariaceae (figwort)

Status in Ireland

Butterfly Bush is an Invasive species and falls under the broader framework of managing species that may threaten biodiversity and natural habitats. Special attention must be given to the management of invasive species within or near Natura 2000 sites.

Description / Profile

The Butterfly Bush was originally introduced as an ornamental plant due to its attractive flowers and ability to attract pollinators, it has escaped cultivation and spread into the wild. Due to its invasive nature, control measures are often necessary, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas or where it is encroaching on infrastructure. Legal and biosecurity requirements in Ireland apply to prevent its spread.

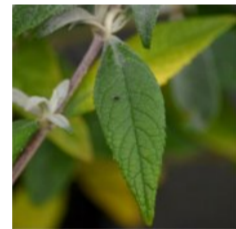


Size

Butterfly Bush can grow up to 5 metres in height and 3 metres wide.

Leaves

Butterfly Bush leaves are Lance-shaped (lanceolate) with a pointed tip, dark green on the upper surface, with a greyish or silvery underside. The leaves are slightly rough to the touch, with a velvety feel on the underside from tiny hairs (pubescence). Leaves grow in pairs directly opposite each other on the stem.



Butterfly Bush Leaf

Stems

Butterfly Bush stems are woody, with an upright, arching growth habit. Young stems are greenish, often tinged with purple, and mature into a grey-brown colour. The stems are initially smooth, becoming more textured and woody with age. Stems can be brittle and prone to breakage.



Butterfly Bush Stem

Flowers

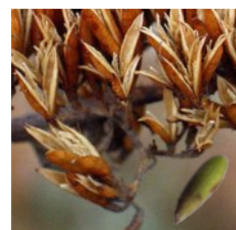
Flowers are Clusters of small, tubular flowers that form elongated cone-shaped panicles. Colour variations range from purple, violet, and blue to white, pink, or even orange, although purple is the most common. Flowers are fragrant with a sweet scent. The plant can bloom from summer to early autumn.



Butterfly Bush Flower

Seeds

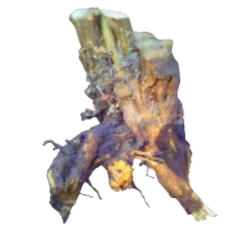
After the flowers fade, they develop into dry seed capsules that are slender and elongated, typically around 1 cm in length. The capsules contain small, lightweight seeds less than 1 mm long typically with thin, papery wing-like structure which aids in wind dispersal.



Butterfly Bush Seed Capsule

Roots

The root system is primarily fibrous, meaning it consists of many thin, thread-like roots that spread out from the base of the plant. The roots tend to remain shallow, often growing in the upper layers of soil. In some cases, the plant may produce new shoots from the root system, particularly if the main stem is cut or damaged.



Butterfly Bush Root

Habitat

Buddleja (Butterfly Bush) thrives in a wide variety of habitats, particularly those that are disturbed or have poor soil quality. Its ability to colonise these environments quickly makes it an aggressive and invasive species in many regions. Buddleja davidii is often found along railway embankments, road verges, construction sites, riverbanks, watercourses. It is also commonly found in areas with rubble, waste materials, or poor, compacted soils, where few other plants can thrive. Its seeds easily colonise these open, exposed areas.

Although Buddleja does not grow well in dense, shaded woodland, it can thrive along woodland edges where there is more light. These open, sunny areas provide ideal conditions for its growth. In some cases, it can spread into grasslands or open scrubland, especially if the area has been disturbed by human activities or natural events like fires or floods.

Control & Management

Effective management requires a combination of herbicide application, mechanical removal, and careful monitoring, particularly in sensitive or protected areas.

Note: *Herbicide use near watercourses requires special permission from the local council or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).*

Chemical Control

Herbicide treatment (such as our Green Matters™ foam treatment) - is the most effective method, particularly when applied in late summer/early autumn when the plant is storing energy in its roots. If near watercourses, use only aquatic-approved herbicides to prevent contamination and consider cut and paint technique for a more precise application. Maintain a buffer zone (at least 10 metres) and avoid herbicide run-off.

Growth Stage - Use appropriate herbicide formulations depending on the growth stage, example, in early growth (spring), full height (summer), flowering (late summer), or dying back (autumn/winter).

Mechanical Control

Excavation - mechanical removal can be effective and can be conducted all year round but must be done carefully to ensure all roots are removed.

S.O.S.™ - JKC soil screening service is an option to reduce costs. Screened soils can be re-used on site to minimising materials requiring disposal.

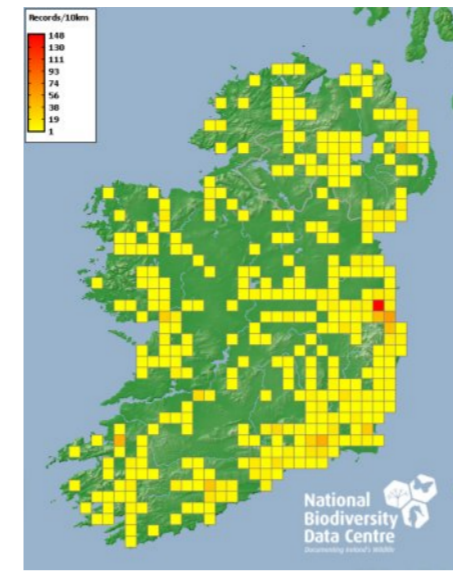
Manual Removal - For small infestations, manual removal of plants, including roots, can be effective. Ensure all root fragments and seeds are removed to prevent regrowth.

Treatment Bund - If there is space on the site, a treatment bund can be considered. Vector material should be placed in a prepared bund that is lined with root barrier and monitored / treated until new growth is completely suppressed.

Root Barriers - Barriers can be installed to prevent the spread of roots into adjacent properties. Installing root barriers can help contain the spread of roots, particularly near infrastructure or sensitive areas.

Herbicide Treatment Timetable for Butterfly Bush

Month	Treatment	Herbicide Type	Herbicide Rate	Considerations
March - April	March - April	Early Growth Foliar Application	Glyphosate-based herbicide (e.g., Roundup ProActive)	4-5 L/ha of 360g/L formulation
May - June	May - June	Mid-Growth Stage Foliar Application	Glyphosate or Triclopyr (e.g., Garlon 4)	Glyphosate: 5 L/ha; Triclopyr: 4-5 L/ha
July - August	July - August	Cut & Paint Method	Glyphosate or 2,4-D Amine	10-20 ml of 360g/L solution per cut stem
September - October	September - October	Late Season Foliar Application	Glyphosate	5-6 L/ha
November - February	November - February	Physical Removal & Maintenance	N/A	N/A



This map shows the current (2024) distribution of Butterfly Bush in Ireland, recorded by the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

Reporting

Reporting sightings of invasive species in Ireland to the National Biodiversity Data Centre and/or the relevant local authority.

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/start-recording>

Monitoring and Maintenance

Regular monitoring of the site is essential, particularly after initial treatment or excavation. Plan for follow-up inspections of treated / excavated areas for at least 2-3 years to check for regrowth or new infestations.

Environmental Considerations

Herbicide Handling - Use PPE, including gloves, goggles, and long-sleeved clothing. Avoid skin and eye contact and inhalation. Follow all safety instructions on herbicide labels.

Herbicide Application Method - Use foliar spraying for large infestations and cut / paint method for smaller stands or in sensitive areas. Ensure accurate calibration of spraying equipment to avoid over-application.

Weather Conditions - Apply during calm, dry conditions to minimise drift. Avoid application during heavy rainfall or when rain is forecast within 6 hours to reduce run-off.

Storage & Disposal - Store herbicides securely in a dry, well-ventilated area away from water sources. Dispose of containers and unused herbicides according to local regulations to prevent environmental contamination.

Watercourses - Butterfly Bush can spread easily along rivers and streams in Ireland, where water can carry seeds downstream.

Soil Movement - Soil movement or excavation might cause further spread, such as during construction projects.

Proximity to Infrastructure - The Butterfly Bush can grow in cracks and crevices in hard surfaces like walls, pavements, and drainage systems. Its shallow, fibrous roots can exploit even small openings in brickwork, concrete, or tarmac, gradually widening them as the plant grows. Over time, this can cause significant damage to buildings, bridges, railway sidings, roads, and retaining walls, leading to structural weakness and costly repairs.

Legal Requirements - The Butterfly Bush is not listed as a regulated species under Irish law. However, due to its invasive nature, local authorities may encourage its control, particularly in sensitive habitats or near infrastructure.

Safety Protocols

Herbicide Handling - Use PPE, including gloves, goggles, face mask and long-sleeved clothing, Coveralls. Avoid skin and eye contact and inhalation.



Follow all safety instructions on herbicide labels. If the infestation is in a public area, signage may be required to warn the public and prevent soil disturbance.

On-site Biosecurity Measures

Prevent Spread - Avoid disturbing the plant unnecessarily, as seeds / root fragments can easily spread and establish new colonies. Remove and bag all cut material for proper disposal.

Equipment Cleanliness - Clean all tools, equipment, footwear, and clothing before leaving the site to prevent the spread of roots and plant material.

Transport of Plant Material - Transport all plant material in sealed containers to an authorised disposal site.

Do not compost or leave on-site, as this can lead to further spread.

Monitoring & Follow-Up - Regular monitoring of the site is essential, particularly after initial treatment or excavation.

Plan for follow-up inspections of treated / excavated areas for at least 2-3 years to check for regrowth or new infestations.

Follow-up treatments may be necessary for several years due to the persistent nature of the root system.

Long-Term Management

Site Rehabilitation - Following successful control, implement a long-term monitoring and rehabilitation plan to restore native vegetation and prevent reinvasion.

Re-vegetation - Replant treated areas with native species to restore ecological balance and prevent re-invasion by Butterfly Bush.

Community Engagement - Engage local communities in identification and reporting of infestations. Educate on its ecological impacts and promote the use of native alternatives for landscaping.

For further information and free advice, please contact:
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