

What's In Your Azalea Bush?

My azaleas line the driveway in my front yard and the poor shrubs have just been screaming at me every time I pull up, “get this greenbrier and wild cherry away from me.” As many readers may be aware, any hedge when left unkempt can be invaded by a plethora of early successional plant species intent upon competing for limited nutrients and sunlight. Unfortunately for me, tangled up with the usual suspects like water oak and the previously mentioned cherry and greenbrier, I found the perennial vine known as MORNING GLORY. Almost instantly it was like scales fell off of my eyes and I could see this plant everywhere! There it was literally choking out the nandina, climbing the crape myrtle, and making a good start on the hibiscus near the front door. This ornamental plant can be highly invasive and while I attempted to retrieve as much of the root as possible, the battle ensued. I know that I have not seen the last of my opponent.

As you might expect, my appreciation for native plants in landscape design grew tremendously with each hand-removal. Vines are planted for many reasons, among those are: to hide, to accentuate, and to add beauty and vertical dimension to the landscape. Fortunately for us, we live in a state that has many absolutely gorgeous flowering “native” vines that can easily grow and meet or exceed the beauty of their exotic counterparts. A few native vine alternatives to morning glory include: crossvine (trumpet shaped orange/red flower in April-June), trumpet creeper (trumpet shaped orange or red flower in June-August), yellow jessamine (evergreen and yellow flower in February-March), and Virginia creeper (red flower clusters in fall). If you would like to learn more about exotic invasive plants and landscape design with natives, check our website for upcoming conferences at www.ugaextension.com/camden and click on the agriculture and natural resources page or give the Camden County Extension Office a call at 576-3219.