

10 Bad-Smelling Flowers and Their Use in Landscaping

Sometimes, Even Blossoms Stink!

By [David Beaulieu](#), About.com Guide

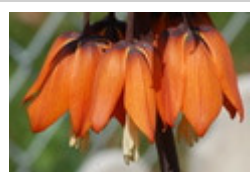
Your first impression may be that it borders on oxymoron to speak of bad-smelling flowers. Isn't the blossom symbolic of fine fragrance? Rose blossoms certainly are, for which we have such proverbial expressions as:

- "[Stop to smell the roses](#)¹"
- "He came up smelling like roses"

Be that as it may, pointing out that a plant has bad-smelling flowers is not exactly a man-bites-dog story. The phenomenon occurs a bit more often than you might think. And I am not even including those strong-scented blooms, such as [Easter lilies](#)², over which people are divided, some listing them among the [fragrant flowers](#)³, others finding the odor offensive.

Nor is the focus of the information below on bad-smelling flowers that you can find on just about any web search on the subject, many of which dwell in the warmer regions of the globe. Instead, my main focus is on bad-smelling flowers that gardeners in the North are more likely to encounter. The examples I list below may not stink as badly as the notoriously foul-scented "corpse plant" (*Amorphophallus titanum*) of Sumatra, but the average reader of this site is much more likely to have dealings with them in everyday life.

1. [Crown Imperial](#)⁴



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David Beaulieu

The blossoms of spring hold a special place in our hearts, an observation that is doubly true for those who garden in the North and must endure long, harsh winters. A subset of spring-bloomers remarkable in its diversity is the group we know as the [spring bulb plants](#)⁶. Consider, for example, just the range in height from the tiny [snowdrops](#)⁷ to the rather imposing crown imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis*).

Crown imperial also contrasts nicely with another of its bulbous compatriots: [hyacinth](#)⁸. But here, the contrast pertains to scent. Hyacinth wafts a sweet perfume on the spring breezes; but crown imperial gives off a skunk scent! Bad-smelling flowers or not, though, I would definitely recommend its use in your landscaping. Its [orange flowers](#)⁹ make a strong statement in the spring garden.

[More Info](#) ¹⁰

2. [Yellow Alyssum](#)¹¹



Your first thought when you hear "alyssum" may be of a white annual used as a [bedding plant](#)¹³, [sweet alyssum](#)¹⁴. The "sweet" in the plant's name is there for a reason: it is sweet-scented.



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But I'm referring to a [perennial](#)¹⁵ with [yellow blossoms](#)¹⁶ when I speak of an alyssum with bad-smelling flowers. Learn more about its use in landscaping as a [ground cover](#)¹⁷ by clicking the link below.

[More Info](#) ¹⁸

3. [Candytuft](#)¹⁹



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Candytuft blooms at about the same time (mid-spring to late-spring in USDA zone 5) as yellow alyssum and its use in landscaping is also as a ground cover. With a name that has "candy" in it, you might assume that its blossoms have a sweet scent, but you would be wrong! I'm not saying they stink to high heaven, just that sticking your nose into them to take a sniff will likely end up a mildly unpleasant experience for you.

But scent aside, this is another spring-blooming plant that I would not be without. Up close, I enjoy gazing into the arrangement of its petals' blossoms; from a distance, a massed planting of it will gain the attention of even the most unobservant.

[More Info](#) ²¹

4. [Bradford Pear Trees](#)²²



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So far, I have listed plants that, despite bearing bad-smelling flowers, I would nonetheless recommend for use in your landscaping. Bradford pear trees, however, I would advise against planting.

But it is not their bad-smelling flowers that make Bradford pear trees a landscaping liability. Rather, it is the brittleness of their branches that is their main drawback. These [specimen plants](#)²⁴ seem to break at the mere hint of a wind storm!

Incidentally, Bradford pear trees are one of many examples of plants with [white blossoms](#)²⁵ that bear bad-smelling flowers. The color white seems to be one of the worst offenders in this regard. I've noticed many white-flowered plants over the years that attack the nose with a cloying scent.

[More Info](#) ²⁶

5. [Hawthorn Trees](#)²⁷



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I associate certain plants with certain places. For example, we vacation every spring in [Maine, USA](#)²⁹, carefully observing what plants the locals use in their landscaping. If we've been sufficiently inspired, we may look up the plant at a nursery, bring it home with us and plant it in our yard. Forever afterward, we will associate it with Maine.

Such is the case with hawthorn trees. We saw one in bloom during our Maine travels in early June one year, in the parking lot of a convenience store (of all places!). We decided that we had to have one. This member of the Rose family is a classic for its berries and yes, its thorns. Its blossoms, however, while attractive to the eye, are not exactly scented like [roses](#)³⁰.

[More Info](#) ³¹

6. [Mountain Ash Trees](#)³²



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David Beaulieu

Do you endeavor to [landscape for the four seasons](#)³⁴, so that there is something to catch the eye regardless of the time of year? If so then mountain ash trees may be of use in your landscaping: they possess three noteworthy attributes, spread across three seasons.

But the bad-smelling flowers they produce in spring are "for your **eyes** only" (keep your nose away!).

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7. [Trillium](#)³⁶



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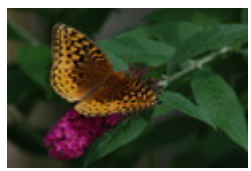
One of my objectives in putting together this list of 10 bad-smelling flowers was to make it diverse. Thus you will find my list occupied by, for example, trees, ground covers, a shrub, a bulb plant. There's also the matter of provenance: these plants come from all over the world.

Trillium is my [wildflower](#)³⁸ representative. Although some gardeners purchase it at specialty nurseries for use in their landscaping, you are more likely to encounter this plant in the woods. Indeed, if you **were** to use this plant in landscaping, it would be most effective in [woodland gardens](#)³⁹, since it is a [shade plant](#)⁴⁰. The *Trillium* with which I am most familiar is native to North America.

Luckily, there's little chance of catching a whiff of its bad-smelling flowers while going about your business in the yard. As a short plant, you would have to go out of your way for your nose to get anywhere near its blossoms.

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8. [Butterfly Bush](#)⁴²



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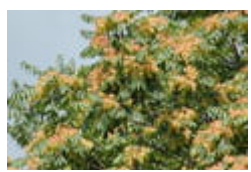
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Perhaps only some butterfly bush shrubs produce really bad-smelling flowers, but none of the varieties I know of are grown for their fragrance. Fortunately, butterflies find them plenty redolent: *Buddleia* is a major magnet for butterflies.

Butterfly magnet or not, butterfly bush cannot be recommended indiscriminately for use in your landscaping. This shrub can be an [invasive plant](#)⁴⁴ in some regions. Find out how it behaves in your region before falling in love with it.

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9. [Tree of Heaven](#)⁴⁶



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David Beaulieu

Tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is unequivocally invasive, and its blossoms unequivocally stinky. No use in your landscaping for this one, folks! But I thought I'd include a picture of it for identification purposes, in case you've spotted this Chinese native somewhere and wondered, "What the heck is that?"

Sometimes termed one of the "junk trees," you are likely to encounter tree of heaven in urban areas. It is aggressive enough to flourish in places abdicated by the more delicate members of the [horticultural](#)⁴⁸ world. Pollution doesn't touch it.

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10. [Dragon Lily](#)⁵⁰



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Karin Holloway

I promised in my introduction that the focus in this list of bad-smelling flowers would be on plants found in northern gardens. Think I'r reneging with this entry? Think again! Although it looks like it belongs on an island bathed by tropical waters, dragon lily (*Dracunculus vulgaris*) is cold-hardy to [planting zone](#)⁵² 5.

Among the other common names for this bad-smelling flower are dragonwort, dragon arum and black dragon. You've probably notice by now all the "dragon" references. Even the Latin genus name contains one, translating as "little dragon." So what's that all about?

Well, this is one of those plants that features a spadix inside a spathe, another example being [Jack-in-the-pulpit](#)⁵³. In the latter case, the spadix is where they get the "Jack" from. In the case of dragon lily, the spadix is imagined to be a dragon. Even if you don't buy that, you have to admit that the plant is sufficiently weird-looking to merit dragon references, one way or another!

Of the 10 bad-smelling flowers here, this native of the Balkans and parts of the Mediterranean would perhaps be deemed the most likely candidate for such a list if you are a plant aficionado and recognize it as a type of arum. The Arum genus is infamous for having some real stinkers in its ranks!

[More Info](#) 54

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