

Autumn Olive

Elaeagnus umbellata

Oleaster Family (Elaeagnaceae)

Description: Autumn olive is a small, spiny deciduous shrub-like tree capable of reaching 20 feet in height. It has alternate oval leaves with silvery undersides. The leaves are simple and lack marginal teeth, but the margins are often crisped or wavy. The small, yellowish-white flowers reach the peak of bloom around mid-May and are highly fragrant. The fleshy fruits are brown at first and mature to a reddish hue with minute metallic dots. Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) is similar in appearance but its leaves are silvery on both sides and its fruits are yellow.

Origin: Autumn olive is native to eastern Asia and was introduced to the United States during the 1830s for a variety of uses including soil conservation and wildlife habitat enhancement. In Connecticut, it has been widely planted along highways, perhaps because of its wind and drought tolerance and its ability to form dense thickets.

Habitat: Autumn olive spreads rapidly from cultivation into old fields, thickets and forest edges. It is extremely hardy and tolerant of drought, wind, and air pollutants.

Why is it a problem? A rapid grower and prolific seed producer, autumn olive out-competes and displaces native shrubs. It forms monotypic stands and reduces floral and habitat diversity. As a nitrogen fixer, it can alter nutrient cycle dynamics and change soil suitability for other shrub species.

Management: Autumn olive is best controlled by cutting in late September and October, followed immediately by application of an herbicide to the cut stems. Spring cutting may actually promote additional growth. Prescribed burning is a good control method in areas where it is feasible.

Alternatives:

For persistent berries:

Aronia arbutifolia (Red Chokeberry)
- also bright fall color

Aronia melanocarpa (Black Chokeberry) – also bright fall color

Ilex verticillata (Winterberry)

Viburnum trilobum (Highbush Cranberry)

For fall wildlife food source:

Cornus amomum (Silky Dogwood)

Cornus racemosa (Gray Dogwood)

Cornus sericea (Red twig Dogwood)

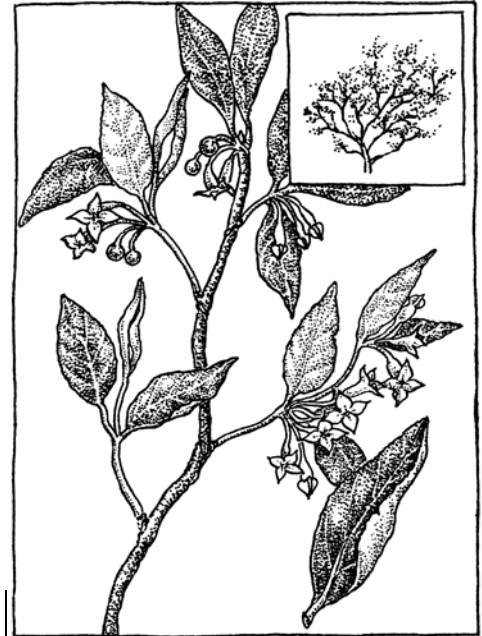


Illustration by E. Farnsworth

Viburnum lentago (Nannyberry)

Viburnum recognitum (Northern Arrowwood)

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