

Weed Identification and Control Sheet:

Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)

Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)

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WI NR-40:
Restricted

DESCRIPTION:

Autumn olive was brought to North America in 1830 for cultivation from China, Korea, and Japan. Native to southeastern Europe and western Asia, Russian olive arrived in the United States in the late 1800s as an ornamental plant. Both were planted by government agencies in the 20th Century in a misguided attempt to provide windbreaks and wildlife habitat. They have proven to be too vigorous in their new home, now being spread widely in bird droppings. These dense growing shrubs can change the composition of the plant community by fixing nitrogen in the soil, allowing them to be very competitive against native species. Autumn olive tends to be more common in the Midwest, but Russian olive are occasionally found.



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IDENTIFICATION:

These shrubs are typically 5-20' tall. The leaves of autumn olive are alternately arranged with a silvery underside and a coarse texture, often with wavy leaf edges. Russian olive are similar but noticeably elongated. The creamy yellow flowers of both these species bloom in spring. Looking at the fruit is a easy way to distinguish these two species. Mealy dry fruits are found on the Russian olive whereas juicy red fruit can be seen on the autumn olive. Russian olive often has more thorns than autumn olive. Young twigs of both species are a vibrant rusty brown color, often contrasting significantly with the more gray color of older branches.

CONTROL METHODS:

Chemical: Autumn olive and Russian olive should be cut as close to the ground as possible and the stumps treated with herbicide (cut-stump treatment). Glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) at 100% concentration or Triclopyr (Garlon® 4, Tordon®, etc.) at 15% concentration, can both be successful at killing the root. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.



autumn olive fruit



autumn olive leaf

Organic: When removing saplings a sharp shovel, Parsnip Predator or a weed wrench will aid in removing the root. But consider the effects of soil disturbance and erosion when uprooting plants, especially on slopes (compared to the impacts of using herbicide). Olives will readily resprout if the shrub is simply cut down. To prevent this, tie a heavy-duty black plastic bag around the stump or cover with a weighted bucket and leave in place for 2 growing seasons. Otherwise, repeated cutting of resprouts immediately after they appear will be needed for 1-3 growing seasons.


 Russian olive fruit & leaves
Photo: P. Breen, OR State Univ., Bugwood.org

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

In borders and hedgerows use wild plum (*Prunus americana*), hazelnut (*Corylus americanus*), gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*), and nannyberry viburnum (*Viburnum lentago*), all excellent replacements. Use pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) for shade and hawthorns (*Crataegus* spp.) or serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.) for sunny places. All these shrubs and trees provide showy spring flowers, attractive fall foliage and berries which feed songbirds.