

# Common Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*)

## Border Privet (*Ligustrum obtusifolium*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Privet is a semi-evergreen shrub in the olive family that was introduced from Europe and Asia in the mid-1800's as an ornamental hedgerow plant. Of the several different varieties introduced into the U.S., the common and border privet are the species known to escape from cultivation in the Midwest. This invasive plant thrives in moist, rich soil conditions of low-lying woodland openings, abandoned fields and fencerows where it can spread into forests and form dense thickets. The thicket-forming shrub quickly out-competes native understory tree species and is hard to control once established in an area. Seeds are spread widely by birds. All parts of plant are toxic to humans and mammalian herbivores.

**-3**  
**Agressive**  
**Weed**

### IDENTIFICATION:

The two species are relatively difficult to distinguish, however, the young twigs of border privet tend to be considerably hairy. Both shrub species can grow up to 20 ft. tall with an upright, spreading form and dense, leafy branches. Mature shrubs are multi-stemmed. Leaves are glossy and leathery, oval to egg-shaped and mostly evergreen. Small, white to cream, fragrant flowers bloom at the ends of branches from April to June. The leaves and spherical, dark purplish black berries persist into the winter months. Reproduces by seed and root sprouts.

### CONTROL METHODS:

**Organic:** Young plants can be dug up. Mowing and cutting can be effective for small populations. Stems should be cut several times throughout the growing season to control the spread.

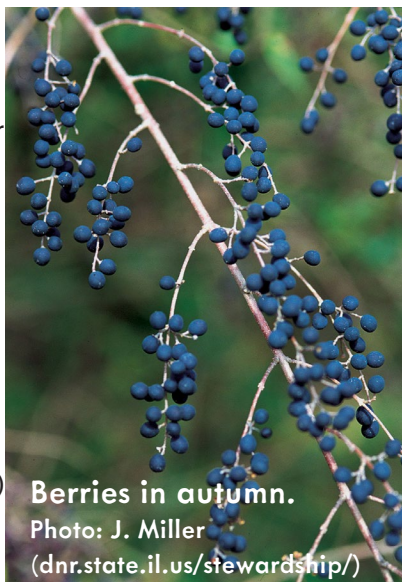
**Chemical:** Glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) and triclopyr (Garlon®, etc) have been effective in killing privet. We recommend cutting the shrub down and treating the stump with a cut-stump (high) concentration of these herbicides (as recommended on the product label). For smaller plants, a foliar application of glyphosate can be applied at 2% a.i. solution with water during summer and fall months. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.



Evergreen leaves.

### NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

One of our native Wisconsin evergreens, winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), is an attractive smaller shrub that tolerates wet conditions and provides winter berries for birds and other wildlife. We also recommend black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), a hardy native shrub with similar attributes as the privet but with reddish-purple leaves in the autumn, and red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) with ornamental bright red winter branches.



Berries in autumn.

Photo: J. Miller  
 (dnr.state.il.us/stewardship/)



Border privet in bloom.

Photo: Steve Baskauf (woodyplants.wdfiles.com)