



Autumn Olive

BVGC INVASIVE SPECIES FACT SHEET

Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) was originally brought over to the U.S. in 1930 to control erosion but quickly became a pest. It is a fast growing, woody shrub whose plentiful seeds are spread through the activity of birds, reaching maturity quickly and aggressively choking out native plants. It is most commonly found on disturbed sites with full to partial sun. However, it is highly tolerant of salinity, extreme pH, and heavy metals, traits that enable the plant to survive or thrive in poor soil conditions, including highway roadsides, and other postindustrial locations.

Description: A deciduous shrub that can grow up to 20' high. Elongated leaves are bright green on top and silver underneath. The bark is ashy brown in color. It has white, trumpet-shaped flowers in the spring, and prolific amounts of red berries in the fall. Russian Olive appears very similar to Autumn Olive. It is also invasive and should be treated with the same control measures.

AUTUMN OLIVE SHRUB



Photo courtesy of Chris Evans
Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, Bugwood.org

Ecological Threat: The Autumn Olive spreads through seed dispersal, primarily by birds. The fruit persists through fall before drying up and falling off the plant. Unlike many native shrub species, this shrub matures quickly and can produce fruit in as few as three years. Though abundant, the fruit are of low nutritional value to wildlife in comparison to the native shrub species they displace. Its allelopathic characteristics (emits a chemical that prevents growth of other plants) adds to the loss of native plants.

The fruit is sometimes collected and eaten by humans, usually made into jellies or jams. Care should be taken when collecting for consumption since heavy metals can be translocated from the roots to other plant parts, including the fruit.

Extermination: Individual small plants can be pulled by hand before they are established. It is important to remove all the roots and to watch the area for any resprouting. If larger than what can be effectively pulled by hand, then cut the shrub and apply herbicide by painting it on stump. It is important to use the herbicide as simple cutting (or burning) will stimulate the plant to produce more sprouts. Before cutting any large shrub, it is advisable to cut and bag any fruiting branches to reduce the spread of the seeds.



Autumn Olive Berries

Photo: Marie Viljoen

Disposal: Bag the remains for safe disposal or burn.