

AUTUMN OLIVE

Elaeagnus umbellata Thunberg.



Autumn Olive

DESCRIPTION: Autumn olive is a deciduous shrub or small tree in the Oleaster family. The leaves are alternate, oval to lanceolate, and untoothed. The underside of the dark green leaf is covered with silver-white scales. The plant may grow to a height of 20 feet with an equal width. The small, yellow flowers are borne along the twigs after the leaves have appeared early in the growing season. The small, round, juicy fruits are reddish to pink, dotted with scales, and produced in great quantity. Autumn olive is easily confused with a closely related species, Russian olive, *Elaeagnus angustifolia*. The leaves of Russian olive remain silvery on both upper and lower surfaces and its fruit is yellow, dry and mealy.

HABITAT: Autumn olive has nitrogen fixing root nodules which allow it to thrive in poor soils. Typical habitats are disturbed areas, roadsides, pastures and fields in a wide range of soils. Autumn olive is drought tolerant and may invade grasslands and sparse woodlands. It does not do so well on wet sites or densely forested areas.

DISTRIBUTION: Autumn olive was introduced to the United States from east Asia in the 1830's. It is found from Maine south to Virginia, and west to Wisconsin. Autumn olive was planted in eastern and central United States for re-vegetation of disturbed areas. Birds forage on its fruits and contribute to seed dispersal.

THREATS: Autumn olive spreads rapidly into old fields and natural grasslands, creating dense thickets that crowd out native vegetation. In addition to its prolific fruiting, seed dispersal by birds, rapid growth and ability to thrive in poor soils, Autumn olive re-sprouts vigorously after cutting or burning. It creates heavy shade which suppresses plants that require direct sunlight.

CONTROL: Seedlings and sprouts can be hand pulled when the soil is moist to insure removal of the root system. On larger plants, cutting alone results in thicker, denser growth.

A glyphosate herbicide can be used to control larger plants. Foliar application has proven effective or the material may be applied to freshly cut stumps. As glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide, care should be taken to avoid impacting other plant species. The cut-stump method will minimize damage to non-target plants.

Adapted from: VA NHP Autumn olive & Russian olive Fact Sheets.

