

# INVASIVE EXOTICS

## Autumn Olive

*Elaeagnus umbellata*

Elaeagnus Family (Elaeagnaceae)

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**What does it look like?** Autumn olive, native to East Asia, is a deciduous shrub that can grow to 20 ft. The leaves are alternate, dark green and covered with silver-white scales. The flowers are small and light yellow in color and appear along the stems after the leaves have sprouted early in the growing season. The fruit is reddish pink and very fleshy. It is produced in large quantities.

**What habitats are threatened by this plant?** Autumn olive will invade disturbed areas such as roadsides, pastures and fields in a wide range of soils. Autumn olive has nitrogen-fixing root nodules that allow it to thrive in poor soils. Autumn olive is drought-tolerant and may invade grasslands and open woods. It does not grow well on wet sites or in densely wooded areas.

**How does this plant spread?** Autumn olive was introduced to the U.S. in the 1830's. It is found from Maine to Virginia and as far west as Wisconsin. Birds, who forage on the fleshy fruit, are the primary means of dispersal, along with raccoons, skunks and opossums. A single plant can produce up to 200,000 seeds per year.

**What problems does this plant cause?** Aside from its prolific fruiting, rapid growth and ability to thrive in poor soils, autumn olive re-sprouts vigorously after cutting or burning. It creates heavy shade, which suppresses native plants. The leaves of the autumn olive also sprout before those of many native trees, producing shade where there would otherwise be none.

**How can it be controlled?** Do not introduce this plant into the landscape. Instead, substitute native shrubs with high wildlife value such as inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) and hobblebush viburnum (*Viburnum alnifolium*). 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 dense growth. A glyphosate herbicide, such as Roundup, can be applied to the fresh cut stumps. This method minimizes damage to other plants. Follow label directions when applying any herbicide.

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