



Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas

Swearingen, J., K. Reshetiloff, B. Slattery, and S. Zwicker. 2002. Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas. National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 82 pp.

Autumn Olive

Elaeagnus umbellata

Origin: East Asia

Background

Autumn olive was introduced into the United States in 1830 and widely planted as an ornamental, for wildlife habitat, as windbreaks and to restore deforested and degraded lands.

Distribution and Ecological Threat

Autumn olive is found from Maine to Virginia and west to Wisconsin. It is drought tolerant and thrives in a variety of soil and moisture conditions. This trait allows it to invade grasslands, fields, open woodlands and disturbed areas. It threatens native ecosystems by out-competing and displacing native plant species, creating dense shade and interfering with natural plant succession and nutrient cycling. Because autumn olive is capable of fixing nitrogen in its roots, it can grow on bare mineral substrates.

Description and Biology

- Plant: deciduous shrub that can grow to 20 feet in height; stems, buds and leaves have a dense covering of silvery to rusty scales.
- Leaves: egg or lance-shaped, smooth margined and alternate along the stem; underside of leaves covered with silver-white scales.
- Flowers, fruits and seeds: plants begin to flower after three years. Small, light yellow, aromatic flowers appear in June and July; fruits are small, round, pink to reddish and dotted with scales.
- Spreads: by seed, although some vegetative propagation also occurs. Birds and mammals disperse fruits.



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Prevention and Control

Do not plant autumn olive. Individual young plants can be hand-pulled, ensuring that roots are removed. Cutting, in combination with herbicide application, is effective. Hedges can be cut down using a brush type mower, chain saw, or similar tool, and stumps treated with a systemic herbicide like glyphosate or triclopyr. Application of these herbicides to foliage is also effective but is likely to impact non-target species. Herbivorous animals are not known to feed on it and few insects seem to utilize or bother it. Canker disease is occasionally a problem but not enough to be useful as a control agent.

Native Alternatives

spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)



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northern bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)



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arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)



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black haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*)



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gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)



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winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)



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