

Privet - *Ligustrum* spp.

Identification

Although several species of privet occur in the Southeast, they are often hard to distinguish. In general, privet is a thick, evergreen to semi-evergreen shrub up to 30 feet in height. Bark is light gray to tan in color and very smooth. Trunks usually occur as multiple stems with many long, leafy branches. The opposite leaves are thick, somewhat waxy, oval and 0.5 to 1.5 inches long. White flowers are very abundant and occur in clusters at the end of branches (Figure 42). Fruit ripen to a dark purple to black color and persist into winter (Figure 43).

Habitat and Distribution

Privet was introduced into the United States in the early 1800s. It is commonly used as an ornamental shrub and for hedgerows. Privet can invade a wide variety of habitats including floodplains, stream sides, upland and bottomland forests, old fields, road sides, rights-of-way, fencerows, windbreaks, pastures, savannas, wetlands, and most any other habitat (Figure 44). It prefers moist open lands but can be found in highly shaded or dry areas. Privet readily invades both pine and hardwood forests, where it is often found as thickets in the understory. Privet is a generalist and can invade areas with a wide variety of soil types, nutrient availability, moisture, and pH. It is widespread and common throughout the southeast and scattered elsewhere in the U.S.

Impact

Privet is one of the most widespread and problematic invasive plants in the Southeast. It reproduces both by sprouts and by seeds, which are bird and mammal dispersed. It spreads quickly and once established can form dense almost impenetrable thickets. These thickets shade and displace many native understory and shrub species. Mid-canopy trees and developing seedlings and saplings can be replaced or restricted from establishing by privet infestations. It is very difficult to remove and reinfestations are common because of the abundant seed source.



Figure 42



Figure 43

Response to Disturbance

Promoted by soil disturbance
 Re-sprouts vigorously after being cut
 Establishes well in disturbed areas
 Can invade undisturbed forests in canopy gaps

Reproduction

Primary means – seed and asexual
 Seed production – 1000s/plant
 Seed bank less than one year
 High seed germination rates
 Asexual reproduction - suckering

Seed Dispersal

Bird and water dispersed seeds

Growth Habits

Evergreen to semi-evergreen
 Shrub/small tree
 Shade tolerant
 Full sun tolerant
 Flood tolerant
 Drought intolerant
 Prefers forested habitats
 Cold hardy depending on species

Response to Prescribed Fire

Repeated fires can control (depending on site)
 Not a fire hazard
 Re-sprouts after fire
 Readily establishes after fire



Figure 44

Control Recommendations

Thoroughly wet all leaves with one of the following herbicides in water with a surfactant (August to December): a glyphosate herbicide as a 3-percent solution (12 ounces per 3-gallon mix), Arsenal AC as a 1-percent solution (4 ounces per 3-gallon mix), or Escort XP at 1 ounce/per acre plus 0.25 percent non-ionic surfactant).

During the dormant season (November through February) use a 3-5% glyphosate solution with water applied as a directed spray to completely wet the foliage of the privet. Use a glyphosate product that contains 41% or more active ingredient. With no soil activity and low impact on dormant (leafless) plants, glyphosate is a good option when desirable non-target plants are growing in close proximity to privet.

For stems too tall for foliar sprays, apply Garlon 4 as a 20-percent solution in crop oil (2.5 quarts per 3-gallon mix) to young bark as a basal spray. Or, cut large stems and immediately treat the stumps with Arsenal AC or Velpar L as a 10-percent solution in water (1 quart per 3-gallon mix) with a surfactant. Or, cut large stems and immediately treat the stumps with Krenite (Mixed 50-50 with water). When safety to surrounding vegetation is desired, immediately treat stumps and cut stems with Garlon 3A or a glyphosate herbicide as a 20-percent solution in water (2.5 quarts per 3-gallon mix) with a surfactant.

(See Herbicide Quick Reference page 40-42)