

## **Glossy Buckthorn**      **FRAL4**

***Frangula alnus* Mill.**

Synonyms: *Rhamnus frangula* DC., alder buckthorn, columnar buckthorn, European alder, fen buckthorn

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### **Family: Rhamnaceae**

**Plant.** Deciduous shrub with many sprouts from the base, or small tree, 6 to 24 feet (12 m) in height, up to 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter with glossy bark (thus the common name), thornless stems and an oval, much-branched crown.

Alternate, oval leaves that appear early in spring and linger green into fall, dark green and glossy above with distinct parallel veins,. Stemmed clusters of tiny, white, trumpet flowers in summer yield spherical, green, berry-like fruit that turn red then black in the fall.

**Stem.** Twigs alternate and initially reddish and slightly gray fuzzy with scattered white dots (lenticels), becoming hairless and gray to brownish gray with light dots in lengthwise bands that become raised and eventually turn into lengthwise, shallow fissures on larger stems. Buds pointed and fuzzy. Leaf scars raised with three bundle scars. Cut twigs have yellow sapwood and pinkish to orange centers.

**Leaves.** Alternate, tardily deciduous, narrowly elliptic to oblong to obovate, 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cm) long and one-half as wide with 8 to 9 pairs of parallel veins curving upward at the ends to follow the margin. Margins entire and somewhat wavy. Shiny green above being paler and slightly hairy beneath, turning greenish yellow in the fall. Petioles reddish and hairy, 0.25 to 0.5 inches (6 to 12 mm) long.

**Flowers.** May to September. Axillary, stemmed clusters of small, five petaled, yellowish green, bell-shaped flowers on new growth, appearing after the leaves.

**Fruit and seeds.** May to November. Berry-like, spherical drupes, 0.3 to 0.4 inches (8 to 12 mm) wide, light green ripening to red then black in late summer, fleshy, containing 2 to 3 ovoid nutlets.

**Ecology.** Tolerant of (?) a wide variety of growing conditions, persists in shade with rapid growth in full sun to produce seed as early as year 3. Wide spreading with many sprouts, leafing out early in spring and retaining foliage late in fall leading to the exclusion of other forest plants. Abundant seed spread by birds, with seedlings able to establish in shade. Invades forest edges and understories.

**Resembles** the native Carolina buckthorn [*Frangula caroliniana* (Walt.) Gray], but its leaf margins are finely serrated (serrulate) and leaves are 3 times as long as wide. **Also resembles** another invasive, common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* L.) that also has finely serrated leaf margins, but with 3 to 5 pairs of curved veins, thorn tipped twigs, 4 petals, and 3 to 4 seeds. **Also resembles** the native alderleaf buckthorn (*R. alnifolia* L'Her.), a shrub to 6 feet (2 m) tall and wide with crenate-serrate leaves, 6 to 9 paired veins, and hairless beneath.

**History and use.** Initially introduced from Eurasia and North Africa in the mid-1800's as an ornamental.