

# Russian Olive

TREES



P. Breen



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***Elaeagnus angustifolia* L. ELAN**

Synonym: oleaster

**Plant.** Deciduous, thorny tree or shrub to 35 feet (10 m) in height with a single bole, many long narrow leaves, and many yellow fruit covered with minute silvery scales.

**Stem.** Twigs slender, thorny, and silver scaly becoming glossy and greenish. Branches smooth and reddish brown. Pith pale brown to orange brown. Bark dark brown and densely fissured.

**Leaves.** Alternate, long lanceolate to oblanceolate measuring 1.5 to 4 inches (4 to 10 cm) long and 0.4 to 1.2 inches (1 to 3 cm) wide. Margins entire (rarely toothed). Green to slightly silvery above with dense silver scales beneath. Petioles short and silvery.

**Flowers.** April to July. Axillary clusters, each with 5 to 10 silvery-white to yellow flowers. Tubular with four lobes. Fragrant.

**Fruit and seeds.** August to October. Drupelike, hard fleshy fruit 0.5 inch (1.2 cm) wide and long, resembling an olive. Light green to yellow (sometimes tinged with red). One nutlet in each fruit.

**Ecology.** Found as scattered plants in forest openings, open forests, and along forest edges. Thrives in sandy floodplains. Shade intolerant. Spreads by bird- and other animal-dispersed seeds. A nonleguminous nitrogen fixer.

**Resembles** silverthorn or thorny olive, *E. pungens* Thunb., which is an evergreen with brown scaly and hairy twigs, flowers in late fall producing few reddish silvery-scaly drupes in spring. **Also resembles** autumn olive, *E. umbellata* Thunb., which has leaves with nonscaly upper surfaces in summer, flowers in early summer, and many reddish, rounded berries in fall and early winter.

**History and use.** Native to Europe and western Asia, a recent (early 1900s) arrival in the upper part of the Southeast. Initially planted as a yard ornamental, for wind-breaks, surface mine reclamation, and wildlife habitat.

States with suspected infestations are shown in gray.

**Russian Olive****0997**

Summer