

Silverthorn, Thorny Olive

SHRUBS



T. Bodner

***Elaeagnus pungens* Thunb. ELPU2**

Plant. Evergreen, densely bushy shrub 3 to 25 feet (1 to 8 m) in height, with long limber projecting shoots, scattered thorny branches. Thick leaves, silver-brown scaly beneath. Often found as escaped single plants from animal-dispersed seeds.

Stem. Multiple stems and densely branched. Twigs brown and dense with brown scales and hairy when young. Short shoots with small leaves becoming sharp-branched or unbranched thorns 0.4 to 1.6 inches (1 to 4 cm) long, and in second year producing leafy lateral branches, followed by flowers in fall. Lateral branches distinctly long, limber, and in late summer to spring extending beyond bushy crown and ascending into trees. Bark dark drab and rough with projecting thorns.

Leaves. Alternate, oval to elliptic and thick, 0.4 to 4 inches (1 to 10 cm) long and 0.2 to 2 inches (0.6 to 5 cm) wide. Irregular and wavy margins. Blade surfaces silver scaly in spring becoming dark green or brownish green above and densely silver scaly with scattered brown scales beneath. Petioles 0.1 to 0.2 inch (4 to 5 mm) long, grooved above.

Flowers. October to December. Axillary clusters, each with one to three flowers, 0.4 inch (1 cm) long, silvery white to brown. Tubular with four lobes. Fragrant.

Fruit and seeds. March to June. Oblong, juicy drupe, 0.3 to 0.6 inch (1 to 1.5 cm) long, containing one nutlet. Whitish ripening to red and finely dotted with brown scales. Persistent shriveled calyx tube at tip.

Ecology. Fast-growing, weedy ornamental. Tolerant to shade, drought, and salt. Spreads by animal-dispersed seeds and occurs as scattered individuals, both in the open and under forest shade. Increases in size by prolific stem sprouts. Can climb into trees.

Resembles autumn olive, *E. umbellata* Thunb., and Russian olive, *E. angustifolia* L., both of which are deciduous and are further described in this book. Autumn olive has thin leaves with silver scales (not silver brown) and abundant reddish rounded berries in fall and early winter. Russian olive has silver scaly twigs and leaf surfaces, and many yellow olives in fall and winter.

History and use. Introduced as an ornamental from China and Japan in 1830. Frequently planted for hedgerows and on highway right-of-ways and still used for landscaping.

States with suspected infestations are shown in gray.

**Silverthorn, Thorny Olive****2037**