Frangula alnus
(Glossy buckthorn
European alder buckthorn)

Common Name(s) | Full Scientific Name | Family Name Common | Family Scientific Name | Images | Synonyms | Description | Similar Species | Reproductive/Dispersal Mechanisms | Distribution | History of Introduction in New England | Habitats in New England | Threats | Early Warning Notes | Management Links | Documentation Needs | Additional Information | References | Data Retrieval | Maps of New England Plant Distribution

COMMON NAME

Glossy buckthorn
European alder buckthorn

FULL SCIENTIFIC NAME

Frangula alnus Mill.

FAMILY NAME COMMON

Buckthorn family

FAMILY SCIENTIFIC NAME

Rhamnaceae

IMAGES

Close-up of flowers and fruits
Close-up of pinnately veined leaves
Fruit
**DESCRIPTION**

Botanical Glossary

*Frangula alnus* is a deciduous small tree or coarse shrub that grows up to 6 m (19.7 ft.) tall. It is often confused with *Rhamnus cathartica* (see similar species below). The young branchlets are pubescent. The short oblong to obovate leaves are 3-7 cm (1-2.5 in.) long and are arranged alternately. They are dark green (in the summer) and shining above, and glabrous or slightly pubescent beneath. The leaves turn greenish-yellow to yellow in the fall, and remain on the plant when most other species have already lost their leaves.

The yellow-green flowers of *Frangula alnus* are bisexual and 5-merous, and arranged in 1-8 flowered sessile, glabrous umbels. This plant flowers after the leaves expand, from May to September. The fruit are globose drupes, changing from red to black, and are 0.6 cm (0.25 in.) across. They ripen from July to August. It is important to note that at any given time there can be flowers, partially ripened fruits (red) and fully ripened fruits (black) present on the same plant.


**SIMILAR SPECIES**

*Rhamnus cathartica* L. (Common buckthorn)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th><em>Frangula alnus</em></th>
<th><em>Rhamnus cathartica</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaf arrangement</td>
<td>Alternate</td>
<td>Opposite to subopposite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ends of branches</td>
<td>Spine absent</td>
<td>Spine often present</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaf venation</td>
<td>Pinnate</td>
<td>Lateral veins strongly upcurved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REPRODUCTIVE/DISPERSSAL MECHANISMS**

The fruit of *Frangula alnus* are most often dispersed by birds.

**DISTRIBUTION**

*Frangula alnus* is native to Europe, North Africa and Central Asia. In the United States, this plant is present from Maine south to Pennsylvania and New Jersey, west to Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin. It is present in all New England states.

**HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION IN NEW ENGLAND**

Like *Rhamnus cathartica*, this plant was introduced to the United States before 1800 and started to invade native habitats probably around the early 1900s. In Gray's Manual of Botany (8th edition), the plant is described as "recently and rapidly spreading; likely to become obnoxious."

**HABITATS IN NEW ENGLAND**

Abandoned Field  
Early Successional Forest  
Edge  
Floodplain Forest  
Forest Wetland  
Pasture  
Planted Forest  
Roadside  
Shrub Wetland  
Vacant Lot  
Wet Meadow  
Yard or Garden

This plant tolerates more moisture and requires more light than *R. cathartica*, and can be found in swamps, fens and the edges of bogs. It also can be present in upland habitats such as woodland edges, fencerows and old fields.

**THREATS**

*Frangula alnus* is a great threat to wetlands, where it can form dense stands that cause the growth of other species to be
suppressed. It is readily dispersed by birds, and the extended productivity of the fruits allows it to be dispersed throughout the summer and fall. It is also an alternative host to crown rust fungi that infects oats.

**MANAGEMENT LINKS**

The Nature Conservancy

Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group (CIPWG)

Illinois Nature Preserves Commission

Illinois Natural History Survey
General description and management guidelines

**DOCUMENTATION NEEDS**

Documentation required: Specific photograph or snippet of the branch with flowers or fruits and the leaves.

Best time for documentation: Summer, fall.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Integrated Taxonomic Information System
Taxonomic information about the species

PLANTS Database
Shows distribution information as well as having additional links.

The Nature Conservancy
Extensive description and control information

Maine Invasive Plants, University of Maine
General information and photographs

**REFERENCES**


DATA RETRIEVAL
Select a task by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

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- Export as comma-delimited text file

Submit Selection

MAPS OF PLANT DISTRIBUTION IN NEW ENGLAND

Select a study area by clicking the radio button and then click "Submit Selection."

- The whole New England area
- One or more states
- One or more counties
- One or more towns (county sub-divisions)

Submit Selection