



Common Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica* L.

Common names: common buckthorn, European buckthorn, Hart's thorn, European waythorn, Rhineberry

Native Origin: Eurasia, introduced as an ornamental

Description: Common buckthorn is a shrub or small tree in the buckthorn family (Rhamnaceae) that can grow to 22 feet in height with a 10-inch wide trunk. The crown shape of mature plants is spreading and irregular. The grey to brown bark is rough textured when mature and may be confused with that of plum trees. The inner bark is yellow and the heartwood is pink to orange. Twigs are often tipped with a spine. Leaves are broadly oval, rounded or pointed at the tip, with 3-4 pairs of up curved veins, and have jagged, toothed margins. Leaves appear dark, glossy green on the upper surface and stay green late into fall, after most other deciduous leaves have fallen. In spring, dense clusters of 2 to 6, yellow-green, 4-petaled flowers emerge from stems near the bases of leaf stalks. Small black fruits are about 1/4 inch in cross-section, contain 3-4 seeds, and form in the fall.



Habitat: Common buckthorn prefers lightly shaded conditions. An invader mainly of open oak woods, deadfall openings in woodlands, woods edges, roadsides, prairies and open fields. It is tolerant of many soil types, well drained sand, clay, poorly drained calcareous, neutral or alkaline, wet or dry.

Distribution: This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is reported invasive in CO, CT, IA, IL, IN, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MS, ND, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, SD, TN, VA, VT, WI, and WY.

Ecological Impacts: Dense thickets form, crowding and shading out native shrubs and herbs, often completely eradicating them. Dense seedlings prevent native tree and shrub regeneration. In fire-adapted ecosystems such as savannas and prairies, the lack of vegetation under buckthorn prohibits fires.

Control and Management:

- **Manual-** Remove plants before producing fruit by hand pulling or digging; use control burning in spring and fall, burning may need repeating annually or biannually for two to three years to deplete the seed bank.
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate or triclopyr. Retreat foliage of re-sprouts. Follow label and state requirements.
- **Biocontrol:** Europe research has found several insects for biocontrol. The earliest release of these insects in North America is expected to be between 2007 and 2010.



References: <http://plants.usda.gov>, www.nps.gov/plants, Czarapata, Elizabeth J. Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest: An Illustrated Guide to their Identification and Control, 2005, p. 35-41, www.forestryimages.org