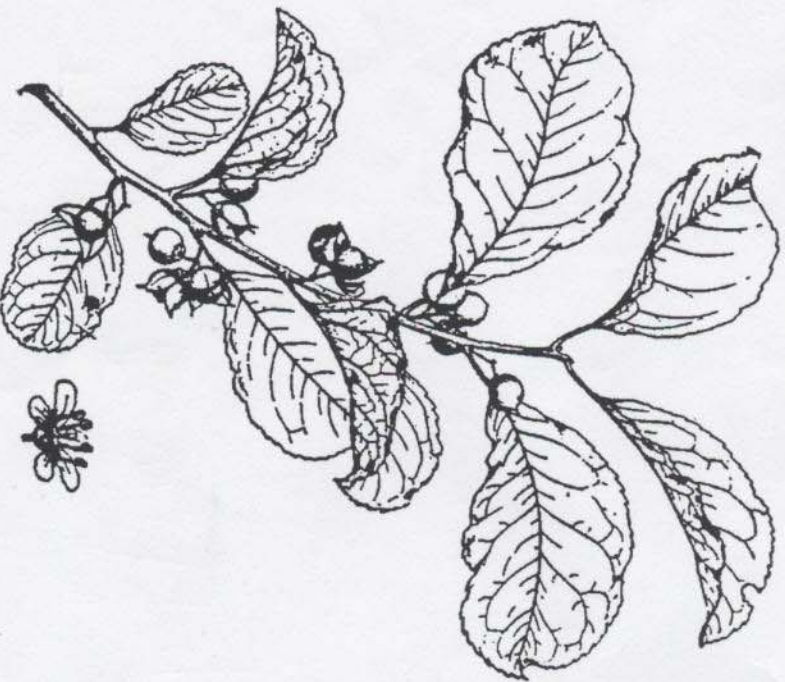


Invasive Alert

Oriental Bittersweet

Celastrus orbiculatus



Description:

A deciduous woody vine with oval leaves and abundant bright yellow and red fruits which persist through the winter. In the fall its yellow-gold foliage is distinctive. Individual vines can grow to over five inches in diameter and over 60 feet long, often climbing up and over tall trees. It prefers open disturbed edges, but can grow enthusiastically in almost any habitat. Once established it sends up rootsuckers. Oriental bittersweet, with fruits growing in axillary clusters, should not be confused with the native American Bittersweet which has terminal fruit clusters.

History:

Oriental Bittersweet was introduced from Asia in the mid 1800's as an ornamental that has gained in popularity for its use in making wreaths. It has been planted to stop soil erosion, for wildlife food and cover, and to produce vines specifically for decorations.

The Problem:

Birds and people who compost or collect the fruits for dried arrangements have enhanced its escape from cultivation. Once established in edge habitats and shrublands Oriental Bittersweet can aggressively outcompete native vegetation for space, water, and nutrients. It shades out native vegetation, and it's twining action can also constrict tree stems, impeding sap flow and increasing vulnerability to wind damage. This species is particularly abundant in the coastal zone where it is a dominant plant on many islands in Narragansett Bay and Block Island.

Control:

The only reliable methods of control is removing plants by hand or mechanical means, or by burning where conditions permit. Foliar herbicides may also be effective but use of such chemicals may also kill desirable vegetation. Careful herbicide treatments applied to cut stems in conjunction with the first killing frost may be necessary. Oriental Bittersweet should not be collected where it is abundant along the coast in order to prevent its spread to inland locations. Because of its abundant seed bank, successful eradication may take two to three years of perseverance.

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