

Oriental bittersweet

Celastrus orbiculatus

Description

Oriental bittersweet hybridizes with American bittersweet, making it a genetic threat to the native species; may impact host species by reducing photosynthesis and girdling trees; the native bittersweet cannot be cut or transported without a bill of sale or proof of ownership under Michigan law.

Habit

Deciduous; woody, twining vine.

Leaves

Simple, alternate, rounded, finely toothed, glossy, leaf tips acute or acuminate, 5-13 cm (2-5 in) long, turn yellow in fall.

Stems

Light brown, often with noticeable lenticels; solid



Photo: Suzan Campbell, MNFI



Photo: James H. Miller

Photo: James R. Allison, GA DNR



Photo: James H. Miller

Photo: John M. Randall, TNC

white pith; can climb 18 m (60 ft) high in trees
and reach 10 cm (4 in) in diameter.

Flowers

Small, greenish yellow; five-petaled; clustered in
leaf axils; blooms in May through June.

Fruits and Seeds

Outer skin (green in summer and yellow orange in fall) covers a red, fleshy aril, which contains 3-6
seeds; fruits clustered in leaf axils, colorful fruit often remains on vines through the winter.

Habitat

Native to Asia. Found in grasslands, open woods, woodland edges, undisturbed forests, roadsides and
fence rows; extremely shade-tolerant.

Reproduction

By prolific seed production and spreading underground roots that form new stems.

Similar

Native American or climbing bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) has elliptical rather than rounded leaves;
flowers and fruits terminal rather than axillary.

Monitoring and Rapid Response

Monitor open woods and edge habitats in late fall when most native plants have dropped their leaves.
Oriental Bittersweet has bright yellow leaves and female plants have persistent showy fruit in leaf axils.
Begin control efforts in highest quality areas; cut plants, allow them to resprout and then spray with
herbicide. Initiate control efforts before burning or opening up forest canopy as both may stimulate

seed bank. In fire adapted communities, prescribed fire may top-kill vines.

Credits

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