

COMMON BUCKTHORN

Rhamnus cathartica L.

Restricted

Common Names

European Buckthorn, Buckthorn

Life Cycle

Woody perennial

Native Range

Europe

Look-a-Likes

[Cherries and Plum \(pg 77\)](#)

[Glossy Buckthorn \(pg 46\)](#)

Habitat

A strong competitor on upland sites in a variety of soil types and moisture regimes. Common buckthorn thrives in the understory, on the forest edge or in full sun often to complete exclusion of other species.

Means of Spread

Ripened berries drop directly beneath the plants where a dense understory of seedlings is eventually produced. The fruits are also highly attractive to birds and small mammals.



Identification

Plant - Tall shrub at 20 to 26 feet with potential to become a small tree reaching 36 feet. Often one to a few stems with diameters up to 5 to 6 inches and occasionally larger. Light colored lenticels on shiny grey to brown bark. Many twigs are terminated by a small thorn-like spine between dark colored, scale covered buds. Cut stems have orange heartwood and yellow sapwood.

Leaves - Sub-opposite, at times appearing opposite and on fast growing sprouts alternate. Shiny green, 1 to 2½ inches, oval with tiny teeth on leaf edges. Veins curving to the tip of the leaf (arcuate venation) provide a strong identification characteristic and green leaves persisting into autumn.

Flower - Dioecious, male and female flowers on separate plants, small, 4-parted and green.

Bloom Time - May to June

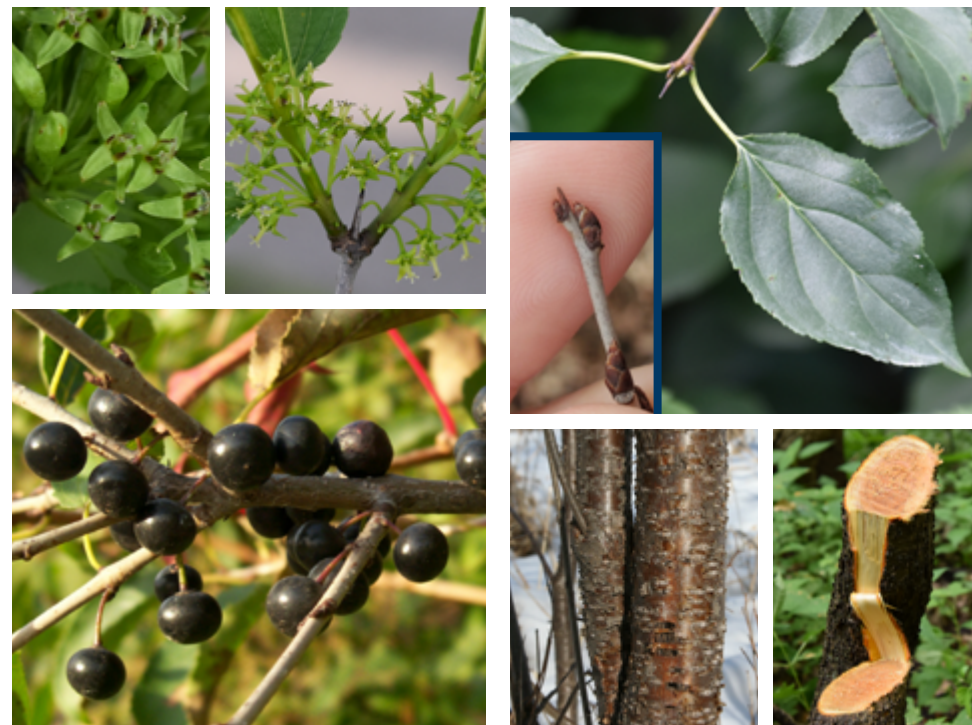
Seed and Fruit - Fruit on female plants only. At maturity a purplish-black, small (¼ inch), berry-like fruit held close to the stem in clusters. Strong identification characteristic are these blackish fruits held close to twigs late into winter. Typically, 3 to 4 seeds per fruit.

Root - Extensive, shallow, and fibrous root system.

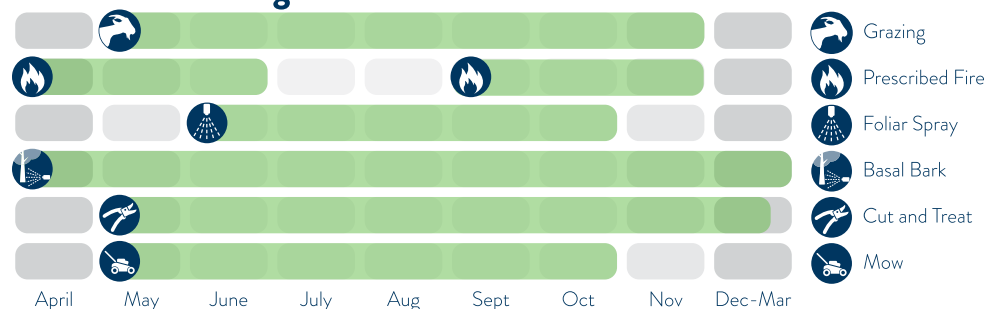
Management

Mechanical - Hand pulling or the mechanical advantage provided by a weed-wrench can help control small infestations. Cutting of stems must be accompanied by herbicide treatments or resprouting will occur.

Chemical - Foliar spray once plants have fully leafed out.



Treatment Timing



Cultural - Goats will readily graze on common buckthorn.

Fire - Prescribed fire will kill germinating seedlings and strengthen surrounding plant community.

Effective herbicide formulations: 2,4-D, glyphosate, imazapyr, metsulfuron, picloram, triclopyr.