

Obtuse-leaved privet, Border privet

Ligustrum obtusifolium Siebold & Zucc.

Olive Family (Oleaceae)



DESCRIPTION

Obtuse-leaved privet is a deciduous shrub that is multi-stemmed from the base, with spreading, twiggy, branches. It has become extensively naturalized in disturbed woods and stream valleys. Several other species, Amur privet (*L. amurense*), California privet (*L. ovalifolium*), and common or European privet (*L. vulgare*) are also present as naturalized species in Pennsylvania; however, obtuse-leaved privet is the most common and invasive of these in our area.

fructing stem

Height - This shrub grows 10–12 feet tall and 8–10 feet wide.

Stem - Branches are slender, light gray, and exhibit an opposite arrangement along the stem. Young stems are hairy.

Leaves - Leaves are opposite, firm, smooth, and 1–2 inches long, tapering slightly to a blunt tip and base. Summer leaf color is dark green, becoming purplish in the fall.

Flowers - The small white flowers are in clusters at the ends of the branches; they are tubular with 4 spreading petal lobes, and about $\frac{1}{3}$ inch long. Blooming occurs in June.

Fruit and seed - The small ($\frac{1}{8}$ inch), black fruits are produced in clusters at the ends of branches; they mature in September and often persist on the plant all winter.

Roots - Sprouting can occur from the roots when the tops are cut back severely.



flowering stem



DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Obtuse-leaved privet is native to Japan; it was introduced as a landscape plant in 1860. It has subsequently become naturalized from New Hampshire to North Carolina and west to Michigan, Indiana, and Tennessee. It is present throughout the southern half of Pennsylvania, and at scattered sites elsewhere in the state. Obtuse-leaved privet is particularly abundant in stream valleys, old fields, forest gaps, and disturbed urban and suburban forest remnants.

EFFECTS OF INVASION

Obtuse-leaved privet can form dense thickets and out-compete native shrub species. Native wildflower species are also inhibited by the dense cover it produces.

REPRODUCTION AND METHODS OF DISPERSAL

The spread of privet is mainly by seeds, which are dispersed by birds. Established plants can also regenerate from root and stump sprouts.

CONTROL

Mechanical - Seedlings can be pulled by hand or a weed wrench can be used to remove larger plants. Mowing or cutting is effective, although resprouting will necessitate repeating the process.

Chemical - Herbicides can be used effectively to control privet; glyphosate and triclopyr are recommended. Either can be used in water as a foliar application or to treat cut stumps. Treatment of the basal 12–15 inches of woody stems with 25% triclopyr in oil is another alternative.

Biological - No practical biological control options have been identified.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES FOR LANDSCAPE USE

Privet, often used for hedges in the past, should be replaced with native species such as: winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*), inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*), bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), wild hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*), ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), silky dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*), arrow-wood (*Viburnum dentatum* or *V. recognitum*), nannyberry (*V. lentago*).

REFERENCES

Rhoads, Ann Fowler and Timothy A. Block. 2007. *The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual*, 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA.

Rhoads, Ann Fowler and William McKinley Klein. 1993. *The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania: Annotated Checklist and Atlas*. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

Internet resources <http://www.paflora.org>, <http://www.invasivespecies.gov>

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