

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Russian and Autumn Olive

Elaeagnus angustifolia and *E. umbellata*



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Background:

Both Russian and autumn olive were introduced into the United States in the 1800s. Prized for their silvery foliage, hardiness and plentiful berries, these shrubs were planted as ornamentals, for erosion control and wind-breaks, and in wildlife food plots.

Range:

Russian olive, native to Eurasia, can be found scattered throughout the eastern U.S. and is a problem further west. Native to east Asia, autumn olive has naturalized extensively throughout the eastern half of the United States. Autumn olive is the more common of the two species in Pennsylvania.

Description:

Russian and autumn olive are large, multi-stemmed shrubs that can reach upwards of 20 feet in height. Their most distinctive characteristic is a dusting of silvery scales covering young stems, leaves, flowers and fruit. Small yellow or white flowers become edible fruits in late summer and fall, which are red in autumn olive and orange in Russian olive.



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Habitat:

Both species are found along streams, fields, roadsides, sparse woodlands, disturbed sites and open areas. Russian olive does particularly well in sandy floodplains. Neither species does well in densely forested areas.

Biology and Spread:

Both species are spread by birds and other wildlife that feed on the fruit. These shrubs grow rapidly and are able to produce fruit as early as three years of age.

Ecological Threat:

These shrubs are highly competitive against native species, shading out shorter plants. Their nitrogen-fixing capabilities may adversely affect the nitrogen cycle of native communities that depend on infertile soils. Although Russian and autumn olive provide a plentiful source of berries for birds, their fruits are actually quite low in nutrients. Ecologists have found that bird species richness is higher in riparian areas dominated by native vegetation.



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How to Control this Species:

Physical

Young seedlings can be pulled by hand when the soil is moist enough to ensure complete removal of the root system.

Small saplings can be pulled sufficiently with a weed wrench. Larger individuals can be cut at ground level or girdled.

Cutting is an initial control measure and should be followed by herbicidal treatment to prevent re-sprouting.

Look-A-Likes:

Russian and autumn olive may be confused with invasive bush-honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.) or native deciduous hollies (*Ilex* spp.)



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Chemical

Use a systemic herbicide, such as glyphosate or triclopyr.

Herbicide should be applied immediately to cut stumps to prevent regeneration. It can also be applied to girdle wounds or directly to the lower bark using the basal bark method.

Large thickets, where risk to non-target species is minimal, can be controlled by the foliar spray method.

Native Alternatives:

Many native shrubs are available for re-vegetation projects. Native plants are the best option for wildlife food plots.



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References:

Global Invasive Species Database: <http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?fr=1&si=262>

Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group:
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/elan1.htm>

For More Information:

DCNR Invasive Species Site: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/conservationscience/invasivespecies/index.htm>

DCNR Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers:
http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/russian_autumn_olive.htm