

## Common buckthorn

### *Rhamnus cathartica*

#### Description

Produces a dense shade that suppresses growth of tree and shrub seedlings, and native herbaceous groundcover, reduces overall plant diversity; changes nutrient cycling by increasing nitrogen and carbon; had been widely recommended for conservation planting until invasive characteristics became apparent.

#### Habit

Deciduous; woody shrub to small tree ranging from 3-7.5 m (10-25 ft) in height and reaching 25 cm (10 in) in diameter.

#### Leaves

Simple, opposite to sub-opposite, oval, dark green in color, smooth and shiny, small teeth along margins, veins that curve from base



towards leaf tip, leaf out early, long growing season.

### **Stems**

One to several stems from the base; stems branch towards the crown; twigs with thorns often found near the tips; bark is brown to gray, peeling with age, dotted with vertical light-colored lenticels; inner bark is orange.

### **Flowers**

Small, green-yellow, four-petaled, clustered in leaf axils, fragrant; bloom May to June.

### **Fruits and Seeds**

Fruit is a round, pea-size, black berry (on female plants only), persistent through the winter.

### **Habitat**

Widely planted as an ornamental shrub in hedge rows; now found along roadsides, woodland edges, prairies, old fields; somewhat shade tolerant.

### **Reproduction**

By prolific fruit and seed production, seeds widely dispersed by birds.

### **Similar**

Native alder-leaved buckthorn (*Rhamnus alnifolia*) is less than 1 m (3 ft) in height with dark scales on winter buds; non-native glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*) has shiny entire leaves, always lacks

terminal thorn.

### **Monitoring and Rapid Response**

Monitor woodland edges and paths. Buckthorn leafs out early and retains its leaves late into fall. Begin control efforts in highest quality areas; hand pull or dig seedlings or small plants; target large, fruit-bearing plants for control/removal; foliar spraying may be effective for large populations where there are few natives present; treat cut stumps with herbicide as stumps sprout; basal bark treatment also effective. Where fuel is present, prescribed fire may provide effective control of seedlings in fire adapted communities.

### **Credits**

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