



Guide to Common Non-native, Invasive Woody Plants

During the process of getting to know the trees and shrubs in your forest, you'll likely encounter species that aren't native to Vermont's natural communities. Some of these "plants from away" can spread quickly and displace native plants. Since non-native plants tend to be less enticing to native insects than native ones, this displacement can reduce the biological diversity of your forest and can inhibit the regeneration of native tree species. Learn to identify the non-native woody plants in your forest so you can decide if and how you'd like to respond to their presence.

Below you'll find some of the most common non-native, invasive woody plants, plus information on how to identify them. Vermont Family Forests encourages [organic forest practices](#) to remove of invasive plants, rather than chemical herbicide use.

Glossy buckthorn and Common buckthorn *Frangula alnus* and *Rhamnus cathartica*

Once established (often spread in bird droppings), both buckthorn species have the potential to spread aggressively because they thrive in habitats ranging from full sun to shaded understory. Both species cast a dense shade as they mature, inhibiting native herbaceous and low-shrub communities, and preventing the sprouting of tree seedlings.

Identification: Common and glossy buckthorns are tall shrubs/small trees reaching 20 feet in height and 10 inches in diameter. Most often they grow in a large shrub form, with several stems. Common buckthorn leaves are dull green, oval, nearly opposite, finely toothed, and 1 to 2 inches long. Twigs may be tipped with sharp thorns. Small clusters of fragrant four-petaled, greenish-yellow flowers grow among the leaves. Glossy buckthorn has similarly shaped leaves, but they are glossy or shiny and lack teeth on their margins.



Common buckthorn, above. Glossy buckthorn, right.

European Black Alder *Alnus glutinosa*

This quick-growing tree escaped cultivation in the late 1800s. A pioneer species, it readily colonizes open ground. Found in wet habitats, it produces abundant seeds that disperse readily in water. Able to form dense monocultures, it threatens native wetland species.

Identification: This tree reaches 30 – 50 feet tall, often with a multi-stemmed trunk. The bark of young trees is smooth and gray-green, but turns grayish brown speckled with short, warty horizontal stripes and irregular, shallow fissures. Leaves are alternate, simple, oval, 2 -5 inches long, with a rounded or slightly notched tip.

Male flowers are slender, red-brown catkins 1 to 1.5 inches long. Female flowers are small, 1/6 inch, reddish-brown, cone-like catkins in clusters of 2–5 near branch tips. In fall, fruits are cone-like woody catkins, initially green, turning brown when ripe, 3/4 inch long, egg-shaped, and contain many small winged nutlets.



Japanese Barberry and Common Barberry *Berberis thunbergii* and *B. vulgaris*

Since birds often eat the fruits, then distribute the seeds in their droppings, the species has easily naturalized. Barberry suppresses the growth of native herbs.

Identification: Compact, spiny, deciduous shrub, with small oval leaves, yellow flowers in spring, and oblong bright-red fruits. You can distinguish common barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*) from Japanese barberry by its toothed leaves and by its flowers, which form a long cluster, or raceme.



Japanese barberry, left. Common barberry, right.

Winged Euonymous (Burning Bush) *Euonymus alata*

Widely planted as an ornamental shrub for its red autumn foliage, winged euonymous can spread by root suckers or by animal-dispersed seeds. It shades out native herbs and crowds out native shrubs.

Identification: Can grow 15 to 20 feet tall and equally as wide. Green-to-brown stems have two to four prominent corky wings. Elliptical leaves are simple, opposite or nearly opposite, 1 to 3 inches long and 1/2 to 1 1/4 inches wide, and finely toothed. Leaves turn bright red in autumn.



Russian Olive and Autumn Olive *Elaeagnus angustifolia* and *E. umbellata*

Introduced from Asia, both Russian and autumn olive thrive in poor soils and sprout vigorously after cutting or burning. Birds and other wildlife eat their fruits and spread seeds in their droppings.

Identification: Autumn and Russian olives are deciduous, thorny shrubs or small trees, with smooth gray bark. Their most distinctive characteristic is the silvery scales that cover the young stems, leaves, flowers, and fruit.



Autumn olive, left. Russian olive, right

Honeysuckle family *Lonicera* spp.

Five non-native species of honeysuckle—Tartarian, Morrow, bell, dwarf, and Amur honeysuckles—have taken up residency in Vermont’s forests. Honeysuckles can form a dense shrub layer in the forest that competes with native woody and herbaceous plants.

Identification: Shrub grows to 16 feet. Leaves are opposite, oval to oblong, 1-2.5 inches. Tubular flowers hang in pairs on slender stalks and produce red, orange, or yellow berries in fall. Prefers lime-rich soils.

Black Locust *Robinia pseudoacacia*

What’s not to like about black locust? Fragrant and tasty spring flowers, rot-resistant wood that’s good for everything from fence posts to firewood. In fact, the story goes that it was once customary in Vermont to give newlyweds a black locust tree.

This native of Southern Appalachia and the Ozarks can sprout from root suckers to form dense groves of clones that squeeze out native shrubs and trees.

Identification: Can reach 40 to 100 feet in height. The bark of mature trees is dark brown and deeply furrowed, with flat-topped ridges. Leaves are alternate, compound (with 7-21 oval leaflets). Fragrant white flowers form drooping clusters in spring and have a yellow blotch on the uppermost petal. Fruit pods are smooth, 2 to 4 inches long, and contain 4 to 8 seeds.

Multiflora Rose *Rosa multiflora*

Native to Asia, multiflora rose was introduced in the 1860s as a root stock for ornamental roses. It has spread prolifically since then and can form dense thickets that displace native plants.

Identification: A thorny shrub with arching stems (canes). Compound leaves hold 5-11 toothed leaflets. The base of each leaf stalk bears a pair of fringed bracts. Clusters of fragrant, one-inch white to pink flowers appear in late spring. Small red rosehips develop during the summer and remain on the plant through the winter.



Tartarian honeysuckle



Norway Maple *Acer platanoides*

Trees produce large numbers of wind-dispersed seeds that invade forests and forest edges. The dense canopy formed by Norway maple inhibits the regeneration of sugar maple and other tree seedlings, reducing forest diversity.

Identification: Leaves are dark green, simple, opposite, 4"-7" wide with 5 lobes. Bark is grayish-black and furrowed. You can distinguish Norway maple from other maples by the milky fluid that oozes from freshly broken leaf stems. The tree leafs out and produces seeds earlier than other maples.

