
Oriental Bittersweet

Celastrus orbiculatus

Identification:

Oriental bittersweet is a deciduous climbing vine or trailing shrub. The stems can reach up to four inches in diameter and are light brown in color. The leaves are glossy and rounded in appearance and arranged alternately on the stem. The small clusters of greenish white flowers appear in May or June, emerging from the leaf axils. The greenish fruits split open to reveal three bright orange/red seeds upon maturity. Oriental bittersweet is often seen climbing trees and is easily spotted in early fall, when the brightly colored seeds are visible.

Origin: Eastern Asia, Korea, China, and Japan

Habitat:

Oriental bittersweet often invades open areas that have recently been disturbed. It grows well in almost any type soil or moisture content, and is highly shade tolerant. It is often observed climbing trees in riparian areas and forest edges. Because of its tolerance to shade, it often moves into forested areas after becoming established in a nearby open area.

Ecological Threat:

Oriental bittersweet is a very dangerous invasive plant because of its high shade tolerance. It grows well in open areas such as riparian edges and roadsides. Once established in these open areas, oriental bittersweet quickly begins to move into nearby forested areas, climbing trees as it spreads. It kills trees by girdling, breaking off of branches, shading out the host tree, or causing wind throw from excessive weight of the climbing vines. It has the potential to invade high value late succession forests and destroy them one tree at a time. Because of its aggressive spreading nature and high shade tolerance, it is considered the worst invasive plant in the southeast ecologically.

Native alternatives:

American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*)

Trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*)

Crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*)



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