

What You Can Do

You can easily remove young seedlings by hand in the fall, before they produce seeds and reach 3 feet high. Pulling older plants is less successful because any remaining root fragments will grow into new plants.

If the plant is too large to pull, a weed wrench can be used. Alternatively, repeated cutting will rob the plant of energy and eventually kill it.

Finally, herbicides may be employed on large specimens and severe infestations. Herbicides may need to be applied repeatedly from spring through winter. Please make sure to read and follow the directions on the herbicide label precisely. Application of herbicide to fresh cut stumps (*i.e.* immediately after cutting) may be particularly effective.

Large-scale herbicide use requires expertise, training, and in some cases a legal license. Again, cutting will have a noticeable effect, so go ahead and cut and pull, but don't expect that to solve the problem on its own.

Great native, alternative species to plant once you rid your landscape of Autumn olive include:

Buffaloberry/soapberry (*Sheperdia canadensis*)

Wild plum (*Prunus americana*)

Staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

American hazelnut (*Corylus americana*)

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.)

The Invasive Species Committee may be able to provide some guidance, possibly help, and would like to know about large infestations in town. To contact the committee, send email to:

invasive@grotonma.gov

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INVASION ALERT!

Autumn olive



Autumn olive growing in open meadow, and closeup of leaves and flowers

Groton has been invaded by a foreign plant: Autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellate*). This deciduous shrub or small tree creates a dense thicket that crowds out native plants and hinders the growth of sun-loving plants. Though beautiful and fragrant, Autumn olive spreads very quickly and is hard to remove.

The purpose of this flyer is to show you what it is, how to identify it, and what you can do about it.

Description

Autumn olive is native to Korea, China and Japan and was brought to the US in the 1930s as an ornamental shrub. In the 1950s it was widely promoted as a great way to provide wildlife habitat and erosion control in environmentally disturbed areas.



Closeup of ripening berries



Autumn olive growing at a field/forest edge

This plant soon became a major problem - and to make matters worse, attempts to remove the shrub by cutting or burning created even more autumn olive! Autumn olive grows on forest edges, meadows, open woods, pastures, riverbanks, roadsides, streams and disturbed areas. The seeds have nitrogen-fixing nodules that allow the plants to grow in even the most unfavorable soil.

One Autumn olive plant can produce more than 8 pounds of fruit (>20000 seeds) each year. Birds eat the fruit and widely disperse the seeds. The plant is a troublesome and pervasive shrub in eastern North America. Autumn olive spreads via seeds and roots, sprouts easily from cut stems, and regrows after fire.



Autumn olive in full fruit

The fruits are edible for humans and animals and are high in carotenoids, especially lycopene. These berries are a traditional food in many Asian cultures and are used to make preserves and juice.

Identification



Top (left) and underside (right) of leaves



Closeup of twig with thorn and ripe berries

Autumn Olive is a thorny, multi-stem, fast growing shrub (6 feet/year!) that often reaches 20 feet tall and 30 feet wide. The plant is easy to recognize in spring because it leafs out while most native plants are still dormant. The leaves are elliptical with a slightly wavy margin and are 2-3 inches wide. The upper surfaces of the leaves are dark green while the undersides are covered with grayish or silver scales. This shimmery look makes the plant easy to identify. The stems are silvery or golden brown, often with thorns.

In early spring, the plant produces multiple clusters of 5 to 10 small, fragrant, pale yellow flowers in mid-spring. The flowers mature into small, edible fleshy fruits or berries that range in color from silvery with brown scales (immature) to speckled pink or red (when mature).



Clockwise from above: Closeup of flowers, closeup of ripe berries with speckles visible, and infestation of Autumn olive in meadow