

# Common Buckthorn

(*Rhamnus cathartica*)



## Key ID Features

**Arrangement:** alternate  
(subopposite)

**Leaves:** finely toothed, glossy, oval,  
dark green

**Flowers:** yellowish-green, 4 petals

**Fruit:** purplish-black and glossy

**Stem:** thin smooth bark with white  
lenticels; inner bark orange; thorns

**Growth Habit:** small tree/thorny  
shrub that grows up to 20 ft. tall



## The Impact

Common Buckthorn (also called “European Buckthorn”) was introduced to North America in the 1800s as an ornamental shrub and windbreak. It forms thick hedges, crowding and shading out other plants. Common Buckthorn also “leafs out” earlier in the growing season than native forest species, re-sprouts when cut back, and the seeds remain viable in the soil for up to 5 years. It can increase the nitrogen content in the soil, which has negative impacts on native species. The fruits have a laxative property which causes the birds and animals that eat them to rapidly digest and disperse the seeds; this both spreads the plant and limits the animals’ ability to absorb nutrients.

Common Buckthorn also has economic impacts, acting as an alternative host for crown rust fungus (*Puccinia coronate*), which inhibits the quality and quantity of oats, and acts as an overwintering host for the Asian soybean aphid (*Aphis glycines*).

## Quick Facts

**Plant Family:** Rhamnaceae

**Origin:** Eurasia, NW Africa

**Habitat:** disturbed areas, meadows and fields, forest edges, forests

**Present in Vermont?:** yes

**Method of Spread:** primarily by seeds dispersed via wildlife

**Status:** Class B Noxious Weed\*  
<http://bit.ly/VTPlantQuarantine>

\*The Vermont Noxious Weed Quarantine listing means it is illegal to buy, sell, or transport this species in Vermont

### Invasive: Common Buckthorn



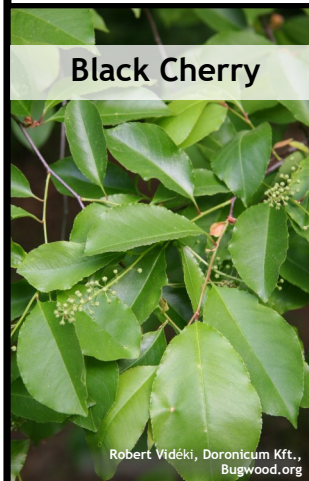
John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org



Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org

## Common Look-alikes

### Black Cherry



Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org

### Crab Apple



Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org

#### Distinguishing features

Leaf: alternate

#### Distinguishing features

Fruit: large fleshy fruit

## Native Plant Alternatives



Dave Powell, USDA Forest Service (retired), Bugwood.org



Vern Wilkins, Indiana University Bugwood.org

**Common Chokecherry**  
(*Prunus virginiana*):  
food source for birds and small mammals, grows in a variety of soils, useful for erosion control, used in hedgerows

**Black Cherry**  
(*Prunus serotina*):  
food source for birds and mammals, attracts butterflies and moths, grows in a variety of soils, hardwood used in furniture

## Control Information

To learn more about identification & control options, check out the Gallery of Land Invasives on **VTinvasives.org** and these additional resources:

[http://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/OIPC\\_BMP\\_Buckthorn.pdf](http://www.ontarioinvasiveplants.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/OIPC_BMP_Buckthorn.pdf)

References: [EDDMaps Ontario - Species - Common Buckthorn](#), [Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program - Common Buckthorn](#), [New York Invasive Species Information - Common Buckthorn](#), [Ontario Invasive Species Factsheets \(PDFs\) - Common Buckthorn](#), [University of Maine Extension: Common Buckthorn v. Glossy Buckthorn](#)

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