THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Weed of The Week

Autumn Olive *(Elaeagnus umbellata)*

The autumn olive is a deciduous shrub that can grow to heights of 20-30 feet. Autumn olive has nitrogen-fixing root nodules that allow it to grow in nutrient-poor soils. They are among the first plants to leaf out in the spring and can grow vigorously in full sunlight, allowing them to aggressively suppress native plants. Similar to the bush honeysuckle with growth patterns, the autumn olive is easily distinguished by its silvery appearance. The autumn olive has dark green to grayish-green leaves that have dense, silvery scales on the underside. Leaves are arranged alternately along stems and have wavy, untoothed margins. Cream to light yellow bell-shaped aromatic flowers appear in early summer. The inside of the flowers has a silvery appearance. These flowers turn into ¼ inch-silvery berries dotted with brown scales that ripen to red or pink when they mature in the fall. The autumn olive is a prolific fruit producer. Each berry contains a single seed. The berries are favored by birds which then help the autumn olive spread.

For mechanical control, it is best to remove small infestations of seedlings and saplings by hand when the ground is moist. All roots need to be removed to achieve effective control. This will likely require multiple attempts as it is difficult to remove every root. Girdling, prescribed burns, bush-hogging, and cutting are all other methods of mechanical control that may help weaken small plants. A follow-up foliar herbicide should be applied when the remaining roots begin to sprout to further weaken or kill the plant. Mechanical treatment alone is usually not enough to effectively control medium to large-sized shrubs. Only cutting the shrub will cause prolific sprouting and increase the number of stems, making control even more difficult. A cut-stump herbicide treatment is often the preferred method when controlling undesirable shrubs. Treatments in the late-growing season of herbicides such as glyphosate or triclopyr applied to the cut surface have shown to be very effective.