

Weed of The Week

Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)

The Russian olive is a non-native, upright deciduous shrub reaching heights over 20 feet tall. In the same genus as the autumn olive, the Russian olive has similar characteristics in both appearance as well as growth patterns. The silver appearance is a signature trade for both olive plants. Near the ground, its branches spread from 10 to 20 feet. Unpruned trees have five or six main stems starting near the ground. The stems and twigs tend to be thorny. The Russian olive leaves are a dull gray-green with dense, silvery scales coating both sides. The leaves are oblong shaped and arranged alternately along stems with un-toothed wavy margins. Its highly aromatic, small yellow flowers bloom in June and July. The berries of Russian olive are 3/8- to 1/2-inch long, elliptical, dry, mealy yellow-brown berries with silvery scales that become shiny when mature in late summer and fall. Seeds remain viable in the soil for approximately three years. Like the Autumn olive, this species aggressively outcompetes native plants and shrubs by growing in poor conditions, growing rapidly, and re-sprouting quickly after cutting or burning.

Control of the Russian olive is the same as controlling the autumn olive. 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 in order 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.

