USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

INVASIVE SPECIES IDENTIFICATION SHEET

Autumn-Olive

Elaeagnus umbellata Thunb.

Alternate Common Name: Japanese Silverberry

-shrub or small tree that **lacks catkins** in the Spring; youngest twigs silvery-scaly
-leaves silvery in color (very much so on back sides); **alternate;** margins wavy, but **not toothed**
-leaf backs and stems have brown dots (especially in Spring)
-fruits abundant; **berry-like**; **red, when ripe**, dotted with silver or brown; **found among leaves**
-frequently there are a few **sharp thorns** hidden among the leaves

Autumn-Olive is readily-spotted by its early leafing out; silvery leaves; numerous, round, red berry-like fruits; and its ability to fill open areas rapidly with dense thickets. All species of *Elaeagnus* in the USA have silvery, alternate leaves. Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia* L.), a non-native species which also behaves invasively, is found in New England, but is less-frequently seen than Autumn-Olive.

The silvery color and brownish dots come from tiny, scale-like particles. **In Autumn-Olive, most of the silvery particles are soon shed**, while in Russian-Olive, the leaves long remain densely silvery on their backs. The 1"-3" long Autumn-Olive leaves are wider than the typical narrow, willow-like leaves of Russian Olive. In early summer, the fruits of Autumn-Olive are brown, very scaly, and not yet juicy. They become juicy and yellow, with scattered dots, finally turning red in the Fall. Russian Olive fruits are drier, oblong in shape (resembling a small olive), and they ripen to yellow or reddish-brown with a dense covering of silvery scales.

Because airborne nitrogen can be "fixed" in its roots, Autumn-Olive has the capability to grow in infertile habitats. This can harm native plants normally protected from competition by the inability of most other plants to tolerate extremely low levels of nitrogen in the soil.

Text and photos by: Charlotte Pyle, October 2002

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