

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Privets (Japanese, Border, Chinese and Common)

Ligustrum japonicum, *L. obtusifolium*, *L. sinense* and *L. vulgare*



Photo: Troy Evans, www.bugwood.org

Background:

These four species of privets were originally imported for use in landscaping around 1860. They are still often used in hedges and landscaping.

Range:

The various privets are originally from Japan, China and Europe. They have spread through the eastern United States, from New Hampshire and Michigan in the north to Florida and Texas in the south.

Description:

Privets are deciduous or semi-evergreen shrubs that often form dense thickets. They have opposite or whorled stems that are brown to gray with slightly rough bark. Privets produce white flowers from April to June, which are followed by green drupes from July to March. These fruit gradually ripen to a dark purple or black color in the winter. It is often difficult to differentiate between the four privets to the species level, particularly when they are not flowering.



Photo: Rebekah Wallace, U. of Georgia, www.invasive.org

Habitat:

Privets are often found in bottom-land forests, fence-rows, fields and rights-of-way. They seem to prefer disturbed areas with rich soil.

Biology and Spread:

Privets mainly spread to new areas via their seeds. Often-times, these are distributed by birds, which have eaten the fruit. Once introduced to an area, privet can regenerate from root and stump sprouts, making it difficult to eradicate.

Ecological Threat:

Privets can form dense thickets, which reduce light and moisture availability for native shrubs and wildflowers. This decreases plant diversity and impacts the animals which depend on them for food and shelter.

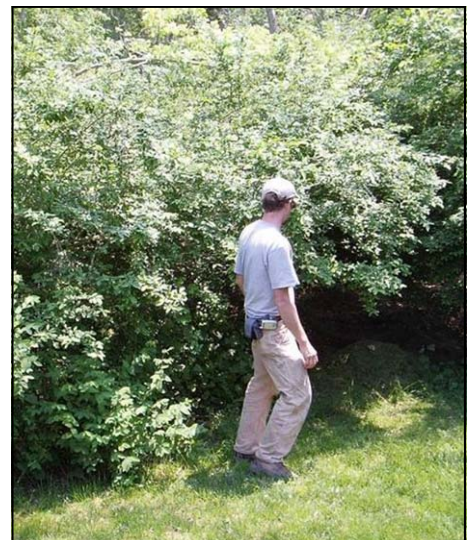


Photo: Leslie Mehrhoff, U. of Connecticut, www.invasive.org

How to Control this Species:

Once established in an area, privet can be difficult to control or remove.

With smaller populations, hand removal can be used. However, fragments of root that are left behind in the ground can re-sprout.

Larger areas can also be treated with herbicides such as glyphosate. Herbicide can be applied to the leaves, or painted on cut stems or stumps. Once the herbicide is applied, disturbances to the privet should be avoided for approximately one year, in order for the herbicide to travel through the privet's root systems.

No biological controls are currently known for privet. Studies show that controlled burning does not appear to have a lasting effect on privet populations, so it is not recommended as a control option.

Look-A-Likes:

There are a large variety of shrub-sized, berry-producing, deciduous alternatives to privets for landscaping purposes. These include species such as spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), dogwoods (*Cornus* spp.) and chokeberry (*Aronia* spp.). These species will all provide food and cover for wildlife.



Photo: Jessica Sprajcar, DCNR



Photo: Chris Vans, River to River CWMA,
www.forestryimages.org



Photo: Richard Webb, www.forestryimages.org

References:

USDA Plant Guide:

http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_lisi.pdf

University of Connecticut Plant Database:

<http://www.hort.uconn.edu/plants/index.htm>

Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health: www.invasive.org

For More Information:

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:

http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf