

BUCKTHORN

What is Buckthorn?

Buckthorn is an invasive understory shrub or small tree that forms a dense canopy and can grow up to 20 feet tall. It out-competes native plants for light and nutrients and becomes the sole, dominant survivor. There are two types: common buckthorn and glossy buckthorn. Common buckthorn thrives in dry to moist areas and grows in full sun to shade. The oval dark green leaves have fine toothed edges. There is a sharp thorn at the tip of the twig. The leaves stay on late into the fall which makes that a good time to find it. However, it is easily confused with native cherry, plum and dogwood. The female plant has berries that turn from green to black. Glossy buckthorn thrives in wet areas but will cultivate in dry land. It grows in both sun and shade. The oval, dark green leaves are glossy with toothless edges. Berries on the female plant turn from reddish-brown to black. For more detail, see the [Minnesota DNR website](#).



Why is Buckthorn a problem?



This highly invasive plant will take over areas and you may even have it in your yard. Buckthorn out-competes native plants for light and nutrients. It overruns natural areas and chokes out native plants. It degrades ecosystems. Buckthorn has no controls. There is no disease or insect in Minnesota that will keep it in check. Because of that, it spreads quickly forming

dense thickets. Birds will eat the berries which are a diuretic and then spread the seeds. Its dense foliage helps it mature quickly. It does not allow native plants to regenerate and grow. If left unchecked, it can destroy wooded areas. Buckthorn is also a threat to prairies, wetlands, rivers and lakes. It forms dense thickets in forests, parks, roadsides and by streams and rivers. It produces a chemical called immoden which doesn't allow other plants to grow near it. With that, it destroys the habitats of animals and amphibians.

How to control Buckthorn.

Buckthorn is easily identified in the fall after many native shrubs and trees have lost their leaves. You can often see it growing under the canopy of overstory trees. It is a dense, green thicket. If the soil is moist, small plants can be pulled, as long as the roots come out. Be sure to tap off the soil from the roots. Slightly larger plants can be pulled using a weed puller. The weed pullers can be borrowed from the city of Maple Grove. Call [\(763\) 494-6000](tel:7634946000) to reserve the weed puller.

For larger plants or when the soil is dry, buckthorn can be cut. Immediately after cutting, a herbicide must be applied to the cut stump. This will prevent resprouting. If this is not done, the plant will resprout with many shoots coming off the stump. Or for non-chemical control, the cut stump can be covered with a tin can (nailed in) or black plastic (zip tied on) and left for 1 to 2 years. Go after the plants with berries first. Because the berries can live in the soil for up to 7 years, it's important to continually go back to the area every year to control small plants as they sprout. You can leave pulled or cut buckthorn on the site. Or, it can be placed in your yard waste or brought to the Maple Grove yard waste site.

In the areas where buckthorn is heavy, once it's removed, if native species don't come back, you may need to plant some native plants. Some native plants include chokecherry, hazelnut, dogwood, nannyberry, and high-bush cranberry. Your local garden center also may have suggestions.

