

Invasive Common Buckthorn

Northbrook's Identification and Control Guide

Common Buckthorn identification

Tall understory shrub or small tree up to 25' high with a loosely branched crown and often multiple stems at the base. Buckthorn greens up early and retains leaves late into the fall; creating dense shade that helps it to out-compete many native plants. If you are still unsure after reviewing photos, bring a sample cutting to the Public Works Department, 655 Huehl Road, during regular business hours for verification.



Key identifying features:

<p>Leaves: Egg-shaped, slightly pointed at the tip, smooth, dark, glossy and finely-toothed. Leaf veins are prominent and curved.</p> <p>Phenology: Leaves are first to grow back in March and last to fall in November.</p>	
<p>Branch: Buds and leaves are opposite. Twigs often end in sharp, stout thorns.</p>	
<p>Wood: Brown bark with elongate silvery corky projections (caution: native plums or cherries have a similar bark). Cut branch exposes yellow wood directly under bark and orange wood towards the center.</p>	
<p>Fruit: Large, round, berry-like clusters of black 1/4" fruit, ripens in August and September. Each contain 1-5 seeds with a narrow groove.</p> <p>Phenology: Fruit ripens July-September but remain on plant when leaves go dormant in November. Seeds germinate when fruit flesh removed, viable for up to 6 years.</p>	
<p>Flower: Small with four petals. Greenish yellow and clustered in the leaf axils. Fragrant.</p> <p>Phenology: Flowers May to June.</p>	

Buckthorn Control Procedures

Why “invasive”?

- Native to Europe: lacks "natural controls" like insects or disease that would curb its growth
- Out-competes native plants for nutrients, light, and moisture
- Provides less food and protection for wildlife, degrading wildlife habitat
- Threatens the future of forests, wetlands, prairies, and other natural habitats
- Serves as host to other pests (Lyme-carrying ticks, crown rust fungus, and soybean aphid)
- Contributes to erosion by shading out other plants that grow on the forest floor
- Forms an impenetrable layer of vegetation
- Rapid reproduction: seed dispersal by animals, resprouts from roots and stumps

Mechanical control schedule and Buckthorn phenology:

C. Buckthorn Timeline	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Life History	Dormant		Germination/ Leaf Out		Flowering		Fruit Ripens		Leaves Persist		Dormant, Fruit Persists	
Cut	Cut							Cut				



Buckthorn is weakest in early spring, before it starts growing anew.

Mechanical control best practices:

Smaller than 3/8" in diameter:

- Pull by hand when soil is moist
- Gather all plant matter, loose fruits, and seedlings in trash bag for removal
- Pack in area with fresh soil and plant native seeds in its place
- Check back for Buckthorn resprouts and pull if apparent

Shrub-sized Buckthorn (1-2" in diameter at base):

- Dig and pull out using hand tools when soil is moist
- Gather all plant matter, loose fruits, and seedlings in trash bag for removal
- Pack in area with fresh soil and plant native seeds in its place
- Check back and anticipate pulling re-sprouts (due to extensive root system and ability to regrow from root fragments)

Large Buckthorn (over 2" diameter at base)

- Use pruners or handsaw to remove plant as close to the stump as possible
- Gather all plant matter, loose fruits, and top two inches of soil in trash bag for removal (1,000 seeds/meter may reside in the top few inches of soil around mature buckthorn)
- Cover remaining stumps with material impervious to light (tin can, thick black plastic)
- Affix the material using nails or ties
- Keep covered for one to two years
- Check regularly to remove resprouts

Northbrook's Buckthorn Removal Program

The Village of Northbrook encourages residents to participate in a Buckthorn control program, which gives residents an incentive to work to control the spread of this invasive plant.

Removal Program Conditions:

- Buckthorn is to be removed at your own cost and labor
- Stack the brush neatly on the parkway with all of the cut branch or butt ends facing the curb
- Do not put any stumps, roots or soil balls on the parkway for pickup. These parts of the Buckthorn have to be disposed of by a landscape contractor or tree service.
- We only accept Buckthorn from residents who are making an effort to eradicate the plants from their private property. If you are simply trimming back Buckthorn on your property or from neighboring properties, please dispose of the cuttings like landscape waste. Clippings will not be picked up by Public Works crews.
- Buckthorn pick-up loads are limited to 3 cubic yards per call. That's about the size of one medium sized truck. Larger loads must be disposed with a private contractor.
- Contact the Public Works Department at 847 272-4711 to schedule the pickup.
- A pickup will be scheduled within 5 to 10 business days. Please do not mix any other brush, limbs, trunks or any other debris with the Buckthorn. ***Any mixed loads will be rejected in their entirety.***

Permitting:

Permits are not required for Buckthorn up to 6" dbh. Please see on the Village webpage the [Tree Removal Application permit](#) for Buckthorn with base trunk of larger than 6" in diameter at breast height.

Replacement Plants

You may replace your Buckthorn with native shrubs that are used as green screening, such as Dogwood or Serviceberry.

Dogwoods have showy flowers and edible fruit. The berries attract birds and other wildlife. Red osier dogwood has bright red stems which add color to the landscape in summer and winter.	
Serviceberry comes in single or multi-stemmed forms. A multi-stemmed tree can be pruned to form a dense hedge. The fruit is edible and attracts wildlife.	

