

# ASIAN BITTERSWEET (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)



Bittersweet is a deciduous woody perennial plant which grows as a climbing vine and a trailing shrub. Mature plants can attain stem widths of 4" in diameter and grow as high as 60'. The leaves are alternate, glossy, and round with finely toothed margins. There are separate female and male. Female plants produce clusters of small greenish flowers in axillary clusters (from most leaf axils), and each plant can produce large numbers of fruits and seeds. The fruits are three-valved, yellow, globular capsules that at maturity split open to reveal three red-orange, fleshy arils with each containing one or two seeds.

Bittersweet is a vigorously growing vine that climbs over and smothers vegetation which may die from excessive shading or breakage. When bittersweet climbs high up on trees the increased weight can lead to uprooting and blow-over.



Bittersweet foliage



Bittersweet berries

**Look-alikes:** American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*)

(Asiatic bittersweet can hybridize with American bittersweet, making identification difficult)



Bittersweet vines

## **Manual removal (preferred method):**

Small infestations can be hand-pulled but the entire plant should be removed including all the root portions. Cut climbing vines near the ground at a comfortable height to kill upper portions and to relieve the tree canopy. Vines can be cut using pruning snips or a pruning saw for smaller stems, or a hand axe or chain saw for larger vines. Minimize the damage to the bark of the host tree. Rooted portions will remain alive and should be repeatedly cut to the ground. Repeated cutting of resprouts will be needed. Begin treatment early in the growing season and repeat the treatment every two weeks until autumn. Check with your local municipality or the organization you're volunteering with about proper disposal methods.

## **Chemical treatment:**

Systemic herbicides like triclopyr (such as Garlon® 3A and Garlon® 4) and glyphosate (such as Accord®, Glypro®, Rodeo®) are absorbed into plant tissues and carried to the roots, killing the entire plant within about a week. This method is most effective if the stems are first cut and herbicide is applied immediately to the cut stem tissue. Fall and winter applications will avoid or minimize impacts to native plants and animals. Repeated treatments will be required.

**Caution:** Applying herbicides to control invasive plants on property you do not personally own requires a pesticide applicator's license issued by the state. A pesticide applicator's license is required to use herbicides on public and private conservation lands.

For more information and references, visit: <https://cisma-suasco.org/invasive/oriental-bittersweet/>