

Fact Sheet: Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* & *Frangula alnus*)

SPOT IT: How to Identify

- **Form:** Invasive deciduous shrubs or small trees that can completely dominate a forest understory.
- **Leaves:** They leaf out exceptionally early in the spring and retain their green leaves late into the fall, long after native plants have dropped theirs.
- **Species Types:**
 - **Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*):** Typically invades oak forests, savannas, and prairies.
 - **Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*):** Commonly found thriving in wet prairies, riparian zones, and moist areas.

THE THREAT: Why It Must Go

- **Creates Dense Shade:** By leafing out early and holding leaves late, it creates a heavy canopy shade that completely suppresses the growth and regeneration of native plants.
- **Alters Soil Chemistry:** Infestations alter the natural soil chemistry and reduce overall biodiversity in the ecosystem.
- **Aggressive Spread:** Birds rapidly disperse the seeds after eating the berries, allowing buckthorn to quickly overrun natural areas.
- **Relentless Resprouting:** Simply cutting the plant down isn't enough; it will aggressively resprout from its roots and root crowns if left untreated.

How to Properly Eradicate

 **Critical Maintenance Rule:** Buckthorn removal is a multi-year commitment. Because of the persistent seed bank in the soil and the plant's ability to resprout, continuous monitoring and follow-up treatments are required for **2 to 10 years** depending on the infestation density.

Mechanical Control

- **Digging:** Best for young plants. Pull or dig them out completely when the soil is moist, ensuring you extract the entire root crown to prevent regrowth.
- **Cutting & Mowing:** Small to medium stems can be cut close to the ground, and dense stands can be cleared with forestry mulching. *Note: Mechanical cutting alone will cause resprouting; it must be paired with chemical control or repeated indefinitely.*

Chemical Control

Applying systemic herbicides is highly effective when done from **late spring to fall**, with late fall to mid-winter being optimal for targeted root kills.

- **Cut Stump Treatment:** Apply systemic herbicides like Triclopyr (Garlon), Glyphosate (Roundup), Picloram (Tordon), or Imazapyr (Stalker) directly to freshly cut stumps to kill the root system.
- **Basal Bark Treatment:** Apply an herbicide mixed with oil directly around the lower base of the stems. This is highly effective for larger plants and drastically minimizes resprouting.
- **Foliar Spraying:** Spray systemic herbicides directly onto the leaves during the summer and fall when the plants are actively growing.

Restoration & Professional Help

- **Replanting:** After eradication, plant native trees and shrubs immediately to help restore the ecosystem and naturally shade out new buckthorn seedlings.

CAUTION: Always follow the pesticide label instructions exactly. The label is the law.

Sources & Further Reading

[University of Wisconsin–Madison Extension](#)
[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)



Rhamnus cathartica
Common Buckthorn