

The Introduction, Spread, and Control of Non-Native, Invasive Species in Tennessee Forests: Chinese Privet

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CHINESE PRIVET (*LIGUSTRUM SINENSE*)

Chinese Privet is one of several non-native and invasive privets that has spread proficiently in the United States south of a line from Kansas to New York. The species include border, California, European/common, Chinese, Japanese, and glossy privets. Although the habitat of each privet species varies slightly, the control procedures are the same. Privets are shade tolerant, deciduous or semi-evergreen, perennial shrubs that retain their foliage during the winter. They create dense thickets which reduce sunlight and moisture availability for native shrubs and ground vegetation, decreasing plant and animal diversity.

Privets spread primarily through seed distributed by birds that have consumed the fruit. Once established in an area, privet can regenerate from root and stump sprouts. Controlling privet involves killing the root system or by mowing or removing young plants before they become fruit/seed producers. Control methods for privet are similar to those for honeysuckles. Privet produces small, white flowers on terminal clusters in May and June with the fruit maturing in September and October. The fruit is a black drupe containing one to four seeds that remains on the plant during the winter.



Leaves and fruit of privet. Photo Credit: Wayne K. Clatterbuck.



Privet shrub with fruit. Photo Credit: Wayne K. Clatterbuck

Privet prospers in disturbed areas such as fence rows, fields, roadsides, rights-of-way, and other habitat edges that birds frequently visit. Without management, these edge habitats frequently form dense hedges from five to 12 feet tall, displacing resident vegetation. Privet is somewhat drought tolerant with the ability to withstand weather extremes.

Privet retains its leaves during the winter. The timing of foliar herbicide application is critical in controlling privet. A non-selective foliar herbicide such as glyphosate can be broadcast during the late winter or early spring to treat the privet without damage to other dormant vegetation. Otherwise, application of foliar herbicide at other times could impact non-target species, especially after initiation of new leaves.



*Privet hedge on field edge and woodland.
Photo Credit: David J. Moorhead, Univ. of Georgia, Bugwood.org*



*Flowers of privet. Photo Credit:
Karan A. Rawlins, Univ. of Georgia, Bugwood.org*

For larger privet where foliar application is not possible, a basal bark spray with triclopyr (oil/ester) encircling the smaller diameter stems can be applied anytime except during the spring when the sap is rising in the plant. Cut stump treatments can be applied with either glyphosate or triclopyr directly after cutting. The goal is to translocate the herbicide to the roots to kill them. However, with the vigorous root sprouting associated with privet, additional herbicide treatments may be necessary until the roots succumb.

FURTHER REFERENCE WEBLINK

University of Tennessee Extension

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W324.pdf>