

PRIVETS

Ligustrum obtusifolium, *L. vulgare*

Status in Maine: widespread



Leslie J. Mehrhoff, UCONN, Bugwood.org | 5453188

Description: Spreading multi-stemmed perennial shrub, up to 15' wide and tall; deciduous, semi-evergreen or evergreen. **Leaves:** Opposite, shiny green, oval to elliptical to lanceolate, entire, up to ~2" long, sometimes at right angles to stem. **Flowers/seeds:** Tubular, 4-lobed, ~ $\frac{1}{2}$ " long, white. Clusters of flowers form at the end of twigs and in leaf axils, and are usually a few inches long and cone shaped. Forms round fruits up to $\frac{1}{4}$ ", green turning blue-black.

Roots: Shallow, fibrous, and spreading.

Native range: Japan, Europe, and North Africa. **How arrived in U.S.:** As an ornamental. Several species of *Ligustrum* have been developed into many ornamental varieties.

Reproduction: By seed. Mature shrubs can produce hundreds of fruits per year. Fruits persist into winter; birds and other wildlife disperse them. Privet does not form a lasting seed bank. Also spreads vegetatively by stump sprouts and suckering.

Habitat: Bottom-land forests and floodplains, forest edges, open woods, shrub lands, open stream systems, barrens, fence rows, and old fields. Can form dense thickets and monocultures.

Similar native species: Native shrub honeysuckles (*Lonicera canadensis*, *Diervilla lonicera*) have opposite leaves



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and branching, but have different flowers and fruits.

Similar non-native species: Burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*) shares privet's branch geometry, but has finely toothed pointed leaves, and usually has corky wings on smaller branches. Shrubby honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.) have opposite leaves but have paired flowers in the leaf axils.

Control methods: Small plants and seedlings may be pulled up by the roots when soil is moist; larger plants can be cut, but re-sprouting will occur. Persistent cutting or mowing multiple times during the growing season over several years may kill the plant, but diligence is required. Mowing can prevent seedlings from establishing. Goats and sheep will browse it but repeated, heavy damage over multiple years is required to kill established shrubs. Herbicides are effective as foliar applications (glyphosate or triclopyr solution), cut-stump application (glyphosate or triclopyr solution applied immediately after cutting except in early spring), or basal bark application any time of year (triclopyr ester in bark oil).

