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Privet (Ligustrum spp.)

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Origin:

Privet species are native to Europe, Asia and Africa and were introduced to the United States primarily for use in the landscape as hedges or tree sculptures.

Description:

These evergreen to semi-evergreen shrubs can grow up to 15 feet in height. Leaves are glossy with a smooth margin and have an opposite arrangement. Small plumes of white flowers appear in early summer at the end of branches; by fall, dark blue berries are produced. This shrub grows in dense thickets, crowding out many other species growing in the area. Japanese privet (*L. japonicum*) has tapering, sharp-tipped leaves that can reach 2 to 4 inches long and 1 to 1.8 inches wide. These shrubs are dark green on the upper leaf surface and have pale green veins on the lower leaf surface. Chinese privet (*L. sinense*) has smaller, thinner and more wavy leaves (1 to 2 inches long by 0.5 to 1 inch wide), and is usually shorter in height. Young branches and midveins on the underside of the leaf are densely pubescent.

Habitat:

Privet grows in fields, hedgerows, woodlands, forest edges, upland areas and disturbed areas such as roadsides. Privet species are both shade- and drought-tolerant, which contributes to privets being able to out-compete native species.

Environmental Impact:

Dense privet hedges prevent the growth of native species and can create a monoculture over time. Many bird and animal species feed on privet fruit and will spread the seed through their feces. All species of *Ligustrum* produce fruit toxic to humans that can cause symptoms including headache, nausea, abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, weakness and low blood pressure and body temperature. Large concentrations of flowering privet may also cause respiratory irritation due to the pollen.

Control methods:

For small infestations of young plants, hand pulling is effective. For older, larger infestations, removal using heavy equipment is effective, but care must be taken to remove all root parts to prevent re-sprouting. For mature plants, mowing will control the spread of privet by preventing the production of flowers and seeds, but will not eradicate the plant. Mowing may completely eradicate young plants if they are not suckers off a mature plant.

Cut-stump treatments with 2 to 4 oz ai/gal imazapyr can provide effective control of privet species. Cut the plant near the ground and treat the exposed stem with imazapyr immediately for the best control. This method has the benefit of minimal soil disturbance and lessens the risk of killing desirable plant species. Multiple foliar applications of 1 to 1.6 oz ai/gal of imazapyr, or 2 to 8lb ai/gal of hexazinone to actively growing plants will also control privet. Please visit http://hortweeds.tennessee.edu/webapp/test/Default.aspx for assistance in finding the appropriate herbicide product.

Alternative plants:

Many plants are available that provide similar benefits to privet. Following are just a few potential possibilities.

- American holly (*Ilex opaca*)
- Carolina holly (*Ilex ambigua*)
- Georgia holly (*Ilex longipes*)
- Moutain holly (*Ilex montana*)
- Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)
- mountain witchalder (*Fothergilla major*)
- sweetshrub (*Calycanthus sp.*)
- Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)

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