



Invasive Species

Leaflet



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Ligustrum japonicum (Japanese Privet)

Initial Introduction and Expansion in Range

As the name indicates, *Ligustrum japonicum* is native to Japan and eastern Asia. It is believed that this plant was introduced to the United States in 1945 for its desirable



characteristics as a specimen shrub and for hedges and screens. Its attractive, glossy leaves and abundant, showy, white flowers have resulted in the widespread cultivation of this plant so that it is now found throughout the Southeast and Midwest.

Although not nearly as invasive and abundant as the closely related *L. sinense*, *L. japonicum* occurs in similar habitats, preferring moist soil conditions but able to tolerate upland sites. It readily grows from root and stem sprouts and escapes cultivation by seeds that are dispersed by wildlife, particularly birds.

Description and Biology

- Large, evergreen shrub up to 20 feet in height.
- Elliptical leaves are 2 to 3 inches long, smooth-edged, glossy, thick and leathery, dark green on upper surface, light green underneath and oppositely arranged along the stem.
- Smooth, gray-brown bark with many raised corky dots (lenticels).
- Clusters of small, creamy white, fragrant flowers are born on large terminal clusters in June and July.
- Small, blue-black, oval fruits ripen in early fall.
- Resembles *L. sinense* (Chinese privet) which has small, less glossy and less leathery leaves.



Habitats Susceptible to Invasion

Ligustrum japonicum is found in the same habitats as *L. sinense* but generally is not as abundant. It invades both lowland and upland habitats but is usually more prevalent in lowlands. Forest gaps can also become invaded since birds often disperse the seeds. This plant can readily expand its range along fence-rows and roadsides.

Prevention and Control

Young seedlings of *L. japonicum* can be effectively controlled by hand pulling. Stems up to 2 inches in diameter can be manually removed by tools designed for this purpose (e.g. Weed Wrench). Larger plants can be killed by spraying the foliage with a 2 percent solution of glyphosate or triclopyr and a 0.5 percent nonionic surfactant. Ideally, the plants should be sprayed in the late fall or early spring when temperatures are above 65 degrees Fahrenheit and many native species are dormant.

As long as the ground is not frozen, this shrub can also be killed by cutting it down near the ground and spraying the freshly cut stump with a 50 percent solution of triclopyr. Larger plants can be killed with the application of a solution of 25 percent triclopyr and 75 percent mineral oil to the basal parts of the tree to a height of 12 to 16 inches from the ground during the late winter/early spring or summer. This method should be used judiciously since it takes a lot of chemical and can result in overspray. It has been used successfully in situations where no other technique is feasible, such as cliff faces or other exposed sites. All treatments should be followed up the next year to monitor and control basal sprouts and root suckers.

THE LABEL IS THE LAW!

WHEN USING ANY PESTICIDE, FOLLOW ALL LABEL INSTRUCTIONS

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Ligustrum japonicum photography by James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org (*left*) and Cheri Smith, NCDOT (*right*).

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