

Why Remove Buckthorn?

By CINDY SCHWEI

Exotic species of plants, like buckthorn, are taking over the bluff and crowding out native species. This lack of plant diversity is hurting the wildlife habitat on the bluff and the river valley ecosystem as a whole.

Recently, I was asked what monocultures (single plant species) were and why would I want to encourage residents to remove a plant that grows well, furnishes birds with food, and provides privacy. It took only a moment for me to ask this person to imagine going to their favorite restaurant and opening the menu, only to find one item listed. They said, "That would be ridiculous! A menu with no choices!" I said, "The same is true for nature." Buckthorn is rapidly eliminating choices. Diversity is the key to ecological health and sustainability.

Unfortunately, diversity is diminishing along the Mississippi River. Even the casual observer will note that a monoculture is emerging and Buckthorn is one of the culprits. It is crowding out native plants and in the process, we are losing wildflowers, trees, and shrubs because the native species cannot compete with an aggressive exotic shrub such as buckthorn. In some areas, an unnatural impenetrable wall of vegetation hides the river.

The goal of the project is to restore the river bluff to its natural pattern of vegetation by removing exotic species. This will help create better habitat for wildlife, better views of the beautiful Mississippi River and a stronger, more vital river bluff ecosystem.

Common buckthorn, glossy (columnar), and fernleaf buckthorn are now on the noxious weed list in Minnesota. What this means is that they will no longer be sold and cannot be transported in Minnesota.

KNOW YOUR BUCKTHORN!

Review the picture on the first page and if you still are not sure, cut a small branch that has leaves (and berries if present) and bring it to a professional nursery for identification.



REMOVING SEEDLINGS AND SMALLER SHRUBS

Small seedlings can be removed by hand or by using a hoe. For larger shrubs up to 2.5" in diameter, a Weed Wrench is available from Ace Rental at 1668 1/2 Grand Ave. (651-690-3510). It's free to use and no chemical treatment is necessary!

CUT LARGE SHRUBS AND TREAT THE STUMP

For buckthorn shrubs greater than two and one half inches, use a hand saw and cut as close to the ground as possible. Follow either option 1 or option 2 for the remaining stump:

- 1) Environmentally safe method: dig the stump out (no chemicals are needed).
- 2) Herbicide (8% Triclopyr, such as Brush-B-Gon) Method: For safety, it is extremely important to read and carefully follow the label directions. The herbicide stump treatment is most successful when used from July through October. *Please Note:* Do not cut the shrub if rain is predicted within four hours.

Purchase a hand spray bottle and use it exclusively for this herbicide. Wear disposable gloves and protective eyewear.

Properly mark the spray bottle before pouring in the herbicide. *Do not dilute!*

Immediately after cutting the shrub, spray only the remaining stump and

exposed bark.

After using the herbicide, pour it back in the original container for safe storage. Keep out of the reach of children.

DISPOSAL OF BRANCHES

For most homeowners there are two options for brush disposal: drop off, or pick-up. NRG Processing Solutions at 915 N. Albert St. is open from April-November and will dispose of the brush for a minimal fee when you drop it off. For hours of operation, call 952-946-6999. Contact your garbage hauler about brush pick-up at your home. While burning is the best way of destroying seeds, it is not allowed in St. Paul. If you don't live in St. Paul, call the city in which you live to inquire about burning permits.

EDUCATION

Spread the message about buckthorn! Buckthorn is easily controlled in mowed areas, but in natural areas it is devastating. Often, people may not know that buckthorn is a problem. Education is the first step in understanding the destructive nature of this exotic shrub.

WILL BUCKTHORN COME BACK?

If you carefully follow the steps listed under number three; your success rate will be reasonably high. Buckthorn only resprouts from the stump, not the roots. However, because each berry contains three or four seeds, seedlings may appear. Be diligent about pulling them!

REPLANTING

About two weeks after chemically treating the buckthorn stump, you can replant a native shrub in the area. There are several shrub selections suitable for many planting conditions. With careful selection, you will have a wonderful non-invasive shrub, which will provide a wonderful habitat and possibly a food source for our feathered friends!

(Editor's Note: The photo above is courtesy of Kathy Bolin, MnDot.)

REPLACE BUCKTHORN with NATIVE SHRUBS

(Please note: Suggestions are for Minnesota. If you live elsewhere,
check with a local nursery for native shrub suggestions)

VARIETY	HEIGHT	SPREAD	LOCATION	SHAPE	FOLIAGE	FALL FOLIAGE	FLOWERS	BERRIES	ATTRACT
Alfredo Compact American Cranberrybush	5'-6'	5'-6'	Full sun to full shade	Compact rounded	Green	Red		Scarlet	Birds
American Hazelnut	6'-8'	6'-8'	Full sun to part shade	Rounded	Dark green	Yellow green		Edible nuts	Birds
Arrowwood Viburnum	10'-12'	10'-12'	Full sun to part shade	Upright, rounded, dense	Dark green, lustrous	Reddish- purple	White	Edible, blue- black	Birds
Cardinal Red Osier Dogwood	8'-10'	10'	Full sun to part shade	Rounded	Dark green	Reddish- purple twigs	White	White	Birds
Clove Currant	6'-8'	6'-8'	Full sun	Irregular, loose and open	Bluish green	Yellow	Yellow, spicy scented	Black	Birds
Dwarf Ninebark	4'-6'	4'-6'	Does well in shaded areas	Dwarf, dense, bushy	Small green		White	Red seed pods	
Eastern Wahoo	10'-12'	8'-10'	Full to part sun	Upright, irregular	Green	Striking red fall color		Pink fruit	Birds
Glossy Black Chokeberry	4'-6'	4'-6'	Full to part sun	Compact, rounded	Glossy green	Brilliant red	White	Black	Birds
Gro-Low Fragrant Sumac	2 1/2'	6'-8'	Full sun	Wide spreading, low	Medium green	Scarlet to orange	Yellow	Red hairy fruit	Birds Butterflies
Isanti Dogwood	5'-6'	8'-10'	Full to part sun	Mounded, dense, slow growing	Dark green, red bark	Reddish- purple	White	White	Birds
Nannyberry	20'	6'-10'	Full sun to full shade	Upright, vase shape, very hardy	Shiny green	Purplish-red	White	Blue- black	Birds
Regent Serviceberry	4'-6'	4'-8'	Full sun to full shade	Mounded	Gray- green	Yellow to red	White	Black- purple	Birds
Summersweet (Clethra)	3'-8'	4'-6'	Tolerates heavy shade	Oval	Deep green	Pale yellow to golden brown	Fragrant white		Butterflies
Techny Arborvitae	10'-12'		Full sun to part shade	Upright, fast growing, winter hardy	Dark green				
White Snowberry	5'-6'	3'-6'	Full sun to full shade	Broad, rounded, good for steep banks	Bluish- green		Pink	White	
Witch Hazel	15'	12'-15'	Part to full shade	Rounded, vase shape, does well in poor soil	Green	Golden Yellow	Yellow		
Yellow Twig Dogwood	6'-8'	8'-10'	Full sun to full shade	Broad, rounded	Glossy green	Reddish- purple	White	White	Birds