Photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

PRIVET

CHINESE, EUROPEAN & JAPANESE

Chinese (*Ligustrum sinense*), European (*Ligustrum vulgare*) and Japanese (*Ligustrum japonicum*) privets are all listed as invasive-exotic species that threaten native South Carolina forests. These are semi-evergreen, multi-stemmed shrubs or small trees that can grow up to a height of 20 feet. *Ligustrum* sp. are native to China, parts of Europe and Japan, and were first introduced into the United States around 1909 for ornamental use as shrub borders, erosion control plantings and wildlife forage. Characteristic flowers of *Ligustrum* species are showy, panicles of tiny, creamy white flowers that are very fragrant and abundant in late spring through summer. Fruit produced are small, rounded dark-purple berries that persist throughout the winter, especially favored by birds.

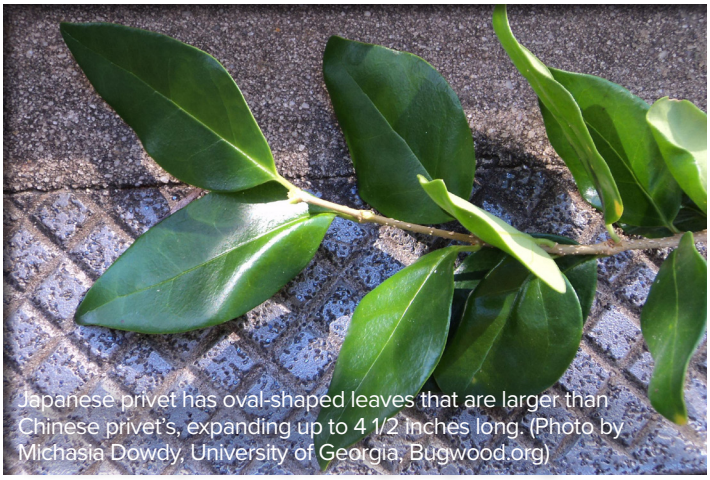
Identification

All three species of privet are similar, sharing common size, form, growth rate and habitat conditions. However, there are some distinct differences in the physical characteristics of the leaves, bark and mature size of each.

Chinese privet is a large, semi-evergreen shrub with small, oval-elliptical shaped leaves with a fleshy green texture and a bright green color. Leaves are the thinnest of all three privet species. Twigs and bark have a smooth texture and light-gray color with white blotches. This species is extremely aggressive and considered a very serious threat to native species in the Southeast. Chinese privet control and management can be very challenging to land managers due to its aggressive growth patterns, prolific root and stump sprouting nature, abundant seed production, and widespread dispersal by animals, particularly birds. Chinese privet forms dense thickets and can tolerate a range of light and soil moisture conditions, varying from forest understories and riparian forests to invasion of old fields and roadsides.

Chinese privet has small, oval-elliptical shaped leaves with a fleshy green texture and bright green color. (Photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org)

European privet has lanceolate-shaped leaves that are thick, waxy and glossy. (Photo by Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org)



Japanese privet has oval-shaped leaves that are larger than Chinese privet's, expanding up to 4 1/2 inches long. (Photo by Michasia Dowdy, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org)

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European privet is a large, semi-evergreen shrub that is commonly planted as an ornamental hedge. This species has lanceolate-shaped leaves that are thick, waxy and glossy in appearance. It is a multi-stemmed, fast-growing shrub with several long, leafy branches, and an average height of 15 feet. Twigs and bark have a brownish-gray appearance.

Japanese privet is a large, evergreen, multi-stemmed shrub or small tree with oval-shaped leaves that are larger than Chinese privet, expanding up to 4 ½ inches long and 2 inches wide. Also, the leaves of Japanese privet have a very glossy, thick and waxy texture in appearance, as compared to Chinese privet. Twigs and bark are greenish-brown to gray and have larger, more evident, surface pores for gas exchange, called lenticels. These appear as large, white dots.

How it spreads

Privet is widely disseminated by many birds and other wildlife species that consume the fruit. Historically, it was primarily shade-tolerant, however, it has since adapted to more light exposure and can establish successfully in sunnier locations. Dense populations of privet can be found in shady areas with moist soils, especially areas along creeks, rivers and streams, as this is a preferred habitat. Privet can be found in most areas of the state with differing soil moisture and light conditions and can quickly dominate the understory shrub layer of a forest, altering community structure through shading out herbaceous plants and reducing survival of tree seedlings.

Privet can be found in shady areas with moist soils and can quickly dominate the understory shrub layer of a forest. (Photo by David J. Moorhead, University of Georgia, Bugwood.org)

Managing privet

Do not plant Chinese, European or Japanese privet. Plant alternative native species instead, such as Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), Bottlebrush buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*), Beautyberry (*Callicarpa Americana*), Spice bush (*Lindera benzoin*), Oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) or native Azalea species (*Rhododendron spp.*).

Privet is difficult to control as it spreads aggressively through bird/animal seed dissemination and aggressively colonizes through root and stem sprouts/suckers.

Mechanical control of privet using hand tools, tree wrenches and heavy equipment are effective, especially when combined with foliar and/or stump herbicidal treatment.

Chemical treatment can also be effective control, especially effective on young plants that have not begun producing seed. Prescribed fire has not been shown to be an effective control method for privet.

Contact information

To find a forest health worker in your state, visit the Southern Regional Extension Forestry website at http://southernforesthealth.net/directory.