

# AUTUMN OLIVE

## INVASIVE OF THE MONTH!

BAY NOLAND-ARMSTRONG

Winter holidays are full of festivities and decorations that sometimes spill out into our yards, but autumn olive is one plant you don't want crashing the party.

Standing anywhere between 3 to 20 feet tall, it's easy to spot thanks to its simple, alternate leaves that show off a silvery, dotted underside –almost like they're wearing metallic makeup. Which you have to admit totally matches the New Year's theme!

From February to June, autumn olive gets all dressed up with small white or yellowish flowers that smell as nice as they look. But don't let that fool you. Come late summer to fall (August to November), it shows off clusters of red berries that may look tasty but don't pack much nutrition compared to our native plants. Wildlife might snack on them, but it's like eating junk food –low on protein and fats.



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Autumn olive didn't mean to cause trouble. Native to China and Japan, it arrived in the U.S. in the 1830s as a pretty garden ornamental and later got a job preventing erosion and providing wildlife habitat. Sadly, it wasn't long before the autumn olive's stay turned sour. This hardy shrub quickly spread across the eastern U.S. especially in disturbed areas like old fields and woodland edges. Its superpower? Forming dense, impenetrable thickets that push out native plants and take over entire ecosystems. Birds spread its seeds, and with climate change in play, autumn olive could soon be popping up even more.

You're left with one question: how do you kick out a guest who's overstayed their welcome? For autumn olive, the best way to remove them is to hand pull small seedlings while they're still young and manageable. Once the plant is large enough that hand pulling is not an option, the plants should be cut and hit with a systemic herbicide on the fresh cuts to stop it from growing back. Timing is key—it's crucial to remove the plant before it's fruiting to avoid spreading even more seeds.

Whatever your holiday traditions are, don't be afraid to kick out these party poopers! Protect your local habitats by giving this invasive shrub the boot. Native plants (and the wildlife that depend on them) will thank you!