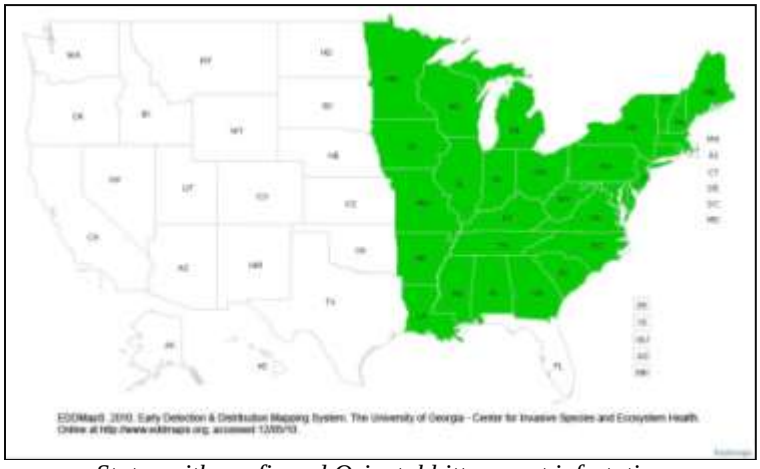
Fact Sheet

Oriental bittersweet in Minnesota

BACKGROUND

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is concerned about Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus oribculatus*), an invasive vine first confirmed in Minnesota in 2010. Oriental bittersweet is established as a significant forest health threat in the eastern United States and Canada, and is spreading west.



States with confirmed Oriental bittersweet infestations

Oriental bittersweet vine girdling a tree

Native to China, Korea, and Japan, Oriental bittersweet was introduced to North America as an ornamental in the 1860s. Unfortunately, it escaped cultivation. Over the decades, it has overtaken vast swaths of eastern forests. The vines girdle trees as they climb to dominate the canopy and shade the understory, reducing and preventing the growth of other plant species. In some cases, the weight of Oriental bittersweet vines in the canopy can break trees, especially with the additional weight of snow and ice. Entire plant communities can be overwhelmed.

Trees broken under the weight of Oriental bittersweet vines

DETAILS

Quickly growing up to 66' long, Oriental bittersweet vines wrap around trees or other support structures. They can also sprawl across open areas and can thrive in a wide range of habitats. . Both male and female plants flower in the spring. Female plants produce fruit that turns bright red in the fall and is surrounded by a yellow fruit capsule. Oriental bittersweet reproduces by seed and rhizome. The fruits contain seeds that are consumed then dispersed by birds and mammals. People move seed by using the attractive fruiting stems in flower arrangements. There is a similar native vine, (*C. scandens*) that can be distinguished from Oriental bittersweet by the fruit capsule color and fruit position (see below). Oriental bittersweet is sometimes mistakenly labeled as American bittersweet then sold and planted. There are cultivars of American bittersweet that are a safe and beautiful addition to landscapes.

American bittersweet (1) can be distinguished by its orange fruit capsule color from Oriental bittersweet (2) which has yellow fruit capsules. Another difference is that fruit on American bittersweet (3) is only at the terminal stem ends, but Oriental bittersweet fruits (4) are along the stem at leaf axils.

ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET IN MINNESOTA

Oriental bittersweet has a limited distribution within Minnesota so there is still a chance to prevent it from spreading throughout the state. This is both an economic and ecological issue. Finding and eliminating Oriental bittersweet populations is the best strategy for minimizing management costs, loss of forest productivity, and environmental damage.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation has detected, reported, and controlled Oriental bittersweet infestations on their rights of way in Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, and Ramsey Counties. Recently, a large infestation was found in Winona. Please report all suspected Oriental bittersweet infestations to the "Arrest the Pest" hotline at 651-201-6684 (metro) or 1-888-545-6684 (toll free). To prevent the spread of Oriental bittersweet, do not collect and use the fruiting stems for ornamental purposes. Bag or burn all fruit for disposal.

More details can be found at www.mda.state.mn.us/plants/badplants/orientalbittersweet.aspx.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Michael Schommer, Communications Director
651-201-6629, michael.schommer@state.mn.us

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