

Common Buckthorn

Rhamnus cathartica L.

Alternate common name: European Buckthorn, which is also a common name of the invasive, non-native Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus* Mill.)

- **shrub or small tree** on which the **bark has lenticels** (*raised corky areas*)
- **branchlets end in small thorns** that come out between the last pair of buds
- **leaves opposite**, (some may be somewhat alternate); 1"-2 1/2" long; **not hairy**
- **leaf margins with small, but clearly seen, teeth**; most leaf tips come to a sudden point
- **leaves with 3-4 veins** (sometimes 2) **on each side of the leaf midrib**; leaf stems grooved
- **leaf veins curve up** to follow the leaf edges **and stand out on the leaf underside**
- **tiny flowers** each have **4 whitish or greenish petals**; flowers grow out of leaf axils
- **fruit** a drupe (**berry-like**), ripening to **black** in late summer; persists well into winter
- **seeds 3-4** (if all develop properly)
- **seeds deeply and narrowly grooved on outer surface**; raised on inner surface
- **young branchlets are not hairy**
- **inner bark yellow**

Common Buckthorn holds its leaves late into the Fall. The **deciduous leaves** change to a light green or yellow color that stands out in the forest understory. Although Common Buckthorn prefers neutral or calcium-rich soils, it thrives in open or partially-open habitats on a wide variety of soils. It may create dense thickets.

In contrast to Common Buckthorn, **Alderleaf Buckthorn** (*Rhamnus alnifolia* L'Her.), a **native shrub, has toothed, but alternate, leaves with 8-9 pairs of veins**. The leaf surface is puckered (like seer-sucker fabric). The buds are scaly, but the branchlets lack thorn tips.



Text and photos by: Charlotte Pyle, October 2002