

Winged Euonymus

Euonymus alata (Thunb.) Sieb.

- **shrub**: can grow up to 20 feet tall and 20 feet wide
- **opposite leaves** with sharply-toothed edges and very short stems
- **twigs** with 2-4 prominent, **corky wings**
- some **cultivated varieties have less obvious winging** on twigs and a more compact form

Winged Euonymus is also referred to as Winged Spindletree, Japanese Spindle-tree, Winged Wahoo, Winged Burning Bush, or Burning Bush (not to be confused with the native species of Burning Bush). Winged Euonymus is distinguished by its winged twigs and its showy, lingering fall color. When planted in the open (highway medians, etc.) its fall color is bright red. Where growing in shaded areas, the color is muted to a purplish red. The flowers are inconspicuous (greenish and less than 1/2" across). The fruits, green at first, ripen with a smooth, purplish outer side that splits to reveal seeds with bright, red-orange coatings. Young, fruit-bearing twigs are green and frequently not as heavily winged as older twigs. The first two leaves of seedlings have entire margins, but subsequent leaves are toothed and the pairs may grow so close together on the stem that they appear to grow in 4's (or 3's as leaves drop in the autumn).

The spread of Winged Euonymus is hard to control because the plants produce many seeds that can fall near the plant or be dispersed into new areas by birds. Winged Euonymus is hardy to USDA Zone 4 and grows vigorously under a wide variety of light conditions and soil types. Its ability to thrive in shady conditions threatens native forest understory shrubs and wildflowers, particularly when the Winged Euonymus forms dense thickets.



Text and photos by: Charlotte Pyle, October 2002