Weed Information Sheet:

Oriental bittersweet

Celastrus orbiculatus

RED HEAD Ecological Consulting

Celastraceae (Bittersweet family)

Identification:

Abundant Perennial vine **Height:** 60' **Width:** 4" **Leaf Arrangement:** alternate

Flower: Green **Blooms:** Late spring **Fruit::** Red berry **Fall Color:** Yellow

Oriental bittersweet is a woody vine with glossy, round-to-oval-shaped leaves. On female plants, flowers and fruits are dispersed along the stem, at leaf nodes, in small clusters of 2-6. Fruits have a three-lobed, hard *yellow outer casings*, open when ripe to expose a red berry. These are prominent on the plant in fall and winter. The leaves of Oriental Bittersweet are typically round to slightly elongated, with only a short stubby tip. This vine climbs by twining the main stem around vegetation and objects rather than by tendrils or clinging roots.

Our native American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens)* is similar in appearance to this invasive Asian species. American Bittersweet leaves are more elongated (nearly twice as long as they are wide) with a long pointed tip. Variation and overlap in leaf shape, as well as hybridization between the species, means that leaf-shape alone can't be relied on for differentiating the two. American bittersweet has large *clusters of 5-20 flowers/berries at the tip of stems*, and *berries have an orange outer casing*. However, roughly half the plants are male, lacking flowers and fruit, making them more difficult to differentiate.


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Oriental bittersweet — *Celastrus orbiculatus*

AKA: ***Celastrus loeseneri***

-5 HIGHLY INVASIVE

NR-40 Restricted

Description & Impact:

Oriental bittersweet is one of the most alarming "up and coming" invasive species in our region. Originally introduced as an ornamental plant, this fast growing woody vein climbs over and twines around other vegetation and can climb into the forest canopy strangling and eventually killing trees. It can grow in full sun or shade. It spreads aggressively and due to its growth form, is difficult to control.

Asian bittersweet *(Cilastrus. loeseneri and Chinese bittersweet (C. rosthornianus)* are closely relate species which may or may not in-fact be varieties of the same species as Oriental bittersweet, depending on the source. They are noted as being more vigorous than Oriental bittersweet, having thicker leaves which are less round in shape. *C. loeseneri* is listed as Prohibited in WI.

Control Methods:

Hand Removal: Smaller plants and infestations can be removed by hand digging the roots of the plants out of the ground. They have the potential to resprout from any root fragments that remain. If there are any berries present or forming on the plant then the entire vine should be burned or removed from the site and disposed of in the landfill.

Traditional: The easiest way to control oriental bittersweet is to cut the vine off where it roots into the ground and treating the stump with a concentrated solution of triclopyr (Garlon®, etc.). For larger infestations consider adding aminopyralid (Milestone®) to the triclopyr mix to improve translocation through the entire root system. Oriental bittersweet will resprout vigorously if it is simply cut. Again, any berries should be removed from the site. Cutting alone, without applying herbicide will lead to vigorous resprouting Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Revegetation Recommendations: American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) does not grow as quickly as Oriental Bittersweet, but is otherwise an ideal replacement. Both male and female plants should be planted together to provide cross pollination and provide fruit production, which are a winter food source for birds.

Red honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*) or Virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*) could substitute for Oriental bittersweet in landscape and wildland situation. Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and Wild Grape (*Vitis riparia*) are fairly aggressive native vines that can provide a ground cover and a "green wall" covering for fences and other structures or can be used as a ground cover. Both species have attractive fall foliage and produce berries that feed songbirds and other wildlife.

Citations: https://renzweedscience.cals.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/177/2025/05/Celastrus-spp-bittersweet.pdf

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