

# Longmeadow's Least Wanted!

## Asiatic/Oriental Bittersweet, *Celastrus orbiculatus*



Vine during summer months.



Berries in autumn.



Bittersweet strangling a mature tree

**Origin:** Asiatic bittersweet also known as Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is native to China, Korea, and Japan and it was introduced for ornamental uses in the 1860's. The species is often associated with old homesites from which it has escaped into surrounding natural areas. Asiatic bittersweet is still widely planted and maintained as an ornamental vine, further promoting its spread.

**Identification / Habitat:** Asiatic bittersweet is a deciduous, climbing, woody vine that can grow to lengths of up to 60 ft. Fruits are round and green when young and ripen to yellow and split to reveal showy red/orange berries that persist into winter. Asiatic bittersweet is commonly found in old house sites, fields, and road edges. Some shade tolerance allows it to also grow in open forests. Roots are orange like the fruit when pulled out.

**Dispersal:** It can be dispersed widely and quickly due to birds eating the berries and spreading the seeds. People also use the vine for decorative purposes then discard them into the natural landscape which leads to further spread. It also expands vegetatively through root suckers.

**Problems:** Asiatic bittersweet is a vigorously growing vine that encircles tree trunks and climbs over and smothers vegetation which may die from excessive shading or breakage. When bittersweet climbs high up on trees the increased weight can lead to uprooting and blow-over during high winds and heavy snowfalls. In addition, Asiatic bittersweet is displacing our native American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) through competition and hybridization. **Look-alike: Asiatic bittersweet closely resembles American bittersweet, but can be distinguished by the American bittersweet having flowers and fruits at the ends of branches rather than in the axils of the leaves. American bittersweet also produces fewer fruits.**

**Control:** Asiatic bittersweet is most effectively controlled by recognizing its appearance early and removing isolated plants before they begin to produce seed. Hand pulling is effective in small infestations. Remove the entire root section or re-sprouting will occur. **Any removal within 100 feet of wetland resource areas, including certified vernal pools, or within 200 feet of a perennial stream may require approval from the Longmeadow Conservation Commission. Please contact the Conservation Commission before you begin!**