

# Japanese privet (*Ligustrum japonicum* Thunb.)

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## Rights of Way



Fig. 1. Japanese privet grows to up to 20 feet tall.



Fig. 2. Japanese privet has small, white, fragrant flowers.

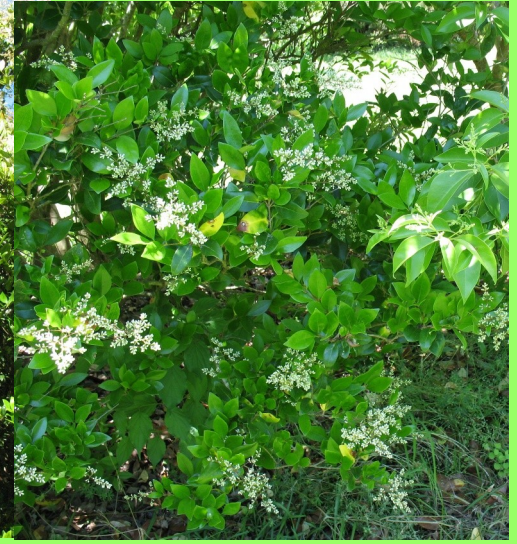


Fig. 3. Japanese privet has thick, leathery leaves that grow oppositely.

## Introduction

### Problems Created

Several species of privet have been introduced in the US since the 1700s, as garden plants and hedges, for which they are very effective. These non-native shrubs, which are difficult to distinguish from one another, include: common privet (*L. vulgare* L.), glossy privet (*L. lucidum* Ait. f.), Chinese privet (*L. sinense* Lour.), and Japanese privet (*L. japonicum* Thunb.). Japanese privet is thought to have been introduced in 1945. The *Ligustrum* species easily escape cultivation to invade adjacent areas, where they can form dense monocultural thickets. As a result, they now are established throughout the eastern part of the country.

### Regulations

The privets as a group are so widespread that they have been omitted from US and regional noxious species legislation. In the southeast, SC includes Japanese privet as a severe invasion threat, and TN lists this species as a significant threat.

## Description

### Vegetative Growth

*Ligustrum japonicum* resembles Chinese privet, *L. sinense*, the latter of which has smaller and thinner leaves and generally is much more common in the MidSouth.

Japanese privet is an evergreen shrub attaining heights of up to 6m (20ft), with a relatively diffusely spreading canopy, and producing thick, somewhat leathery, oppositely arranged leaves. The twigs are glabrous and pale green, darkening brownish to reddish tinged with maturity. Branches also are oppositely arranged and with brownish gray bark covered with numerous raised, lighter colored lenticels. The leaves tend to be ovate to oblong in outline, their bases rounded and tips blunt or tapering, sometimes exhibiting a short apical spine. Leaves are 5 to 10cm (2-4in) long and 2.5 to 5 cm (1-2 in) wide. Their margins are entire and often yellowish rimmed and slightly rolled under. The upper surfaces of the leaves are a lustrous dark green with 4 to 6 pairs of indistinct veins that protrude slightly from the light green under surfaces.

### Flowering

Japanese privet flowers from April to June, producing loosely branching conical clusters of small, white, fragrant, four-petaled flowers at the ends of branches or in axils of sub-terminal branches. Fruit are present from July through February in branched terminal clusters of ovoid drupes, roughly 5 to 12 mm (0.2-0.5in) long and 5mm (0.2in) wide. The fruit are pale green in summer and ripen to blue-black in winter.

### Dispersal

Privets grow readily from seed or from root and stump sprouts. These species escape cultivation by movement of seed, which is eaten and subsequently transported by wildlife, especially birds. Despite a reportedly low germination rate (5%-25%), the privets are highly effective dispersers and can be found in abundance in disturbed areas such as field and forest edges and urban and suburban environments.

### Spread by

Human spread is largely by planting Japanese privet as an ornamental plant in landscaping.

## Habitat

Japanese privet, which is shade tolerant, may occur as single plants or in thickets, frequently occurring in the same habitats as Chinese privet but generally not as abundantly as the latter. Japanese privet will invade both lowland and upland habitats, including floodplains, forests, wetlands and fields, but it usually is more prevalent in lowland habitats, typically at elevations less than 915m (3000ft). All the privets are frequently seen along roadsides and other disturbed areas.

## Distribution

Chinese and Japanese privet are found from Texas to Massachusetts, with *L. japonicum* occurring in a slightly smaller subregion of that area, in about ten states. In the MidSouth, Japanese privet is very poorly represented in herbaria, as indicated by the USDA PLANTS database (e.g., AL, MS, and TN are shown with collections from 2, 5, and 2 counties, respectively). It most certainly is more widespread than those data would indicate.

## Control Methods

### Biological Control

There are no approved biological control agents for this species.

### Chemical Control

Several herbicides are effective in controlling Japanese privet including 2,4-D, 2,4-DP, glyphosate, imazapyr, triclopyr, metsulfuron, fosamine ammonium, and hexazinone. Herbicide applications can be made directly to plant foliage, at the base of stems, cut stumps, frill applications, and to the soil around Japanese privet. Basal herbicide applications can be made to the lower 20 inches of the stem using an appropriate herbicide adjuvant such as a crop oil. Basal applications are more effective on stems 6 inches in diameter or smaller. Cut stump applications are made to stumps immediately after cutting. Frill applications are made by cutting the outer layer of bark and cambium and applying the herbicide to the cut areas.

### Mechanical Control

Hand pulling of young seedlings will prevent future seed production. Cutting or mowing mature plants prior to seed production will prevent seed dispersal and subsequent plant growth. However, any stumps or large shoots that are cut need to be treated with an appropriate herbicide to prevent the regrowth of plants from stumps.

### Physical Control

Shading may prevent seed production, but will not kill the plant.

Herbicide	Rate	Method
Glyphosate	2% solution	Foliar spray, broadcast
Triclopyr	2% solution	Foliar spray, broadcast
	20% solution	Basal, cut stump, frill
Imazapyr	2 to 6 pints	Frill or soil application
Metsulfuron	1 to 3 ounces	Foliar spray, broadcast
Fosamine ammonium	1.5 to 6 gallons	Foliar spray, broadcast
Hexazinone	2 to 4 gallons	Soil application
2,4-D + 2,4-DP	1 to 5% solution	Foliar spray, broadcast
	3 to 4% solution	Basal, cut stump, frill
Imazapyr + glyphosate	1 to 2 gallons	Foliar spray, cut stump, frill
Imazapyr + metsulfuron	25 ounces	Foliar spray, broadcast

## References

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