

Evergreen buckthorn

Also known as Italian buckthorn

Rhamnus alaternus

Family Rhamnaceae



Identification

- Evergreen shrub or tree, usually between 2 - 5 metres tall
- The glossy, leathery, oval leaves can have smooth or toothed leaf edges
- A dioecious species (male and female flowers are on different plants)
- Small, fragrant, green flowers with no petals
- Glossy, dark red berries turn black
- Shoots are purple and hairy when young, brown with thick furrowed bark when mature



Evergreen buckthorn with berries Photo: R. Smart



Evergreen buckthorn Photo: C. Howell

Where is it a problem?

Predominantly a plant of coastal areas (particularly the east coast of New Zealand), evergreen buckthorn can also be found growing along forest margins, in plantations, shrublands and gardens. Evergreen buckthorn is known to be found in Christchurch.

Why is it a problem?

Evergreen buckthorn is a fast growing species that forms dense stands preventing the regeneration of native species. Tolerant of salt, poor soils, shade, grazing and wind, evergreen buckthorn also produces many long-lived seeds which are mostly dispersed by birds. The leaves, seedlings and berries are also eaten by possums, wallabies and cattle.

Control

Small plants or seedlings can be dug out. Larger plants can be cut out at or near ground level and the stump can be treated with an appropriate herbicide. The stumps can re-sprout if left untreated. Use all herbicides in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other plants, the soil and waterways.

Similar species

Evergreen buckthorn can look like and be easily mistaken for a native tree. It can appear very similar to certain coprosma species (see similar species photo).



Similar looking species photos: Top left - *Coprosma lucida*, N. Head. Top right - *C. robusta*, N. Head. Lower left - *Pennantia corymbosa*, N. Head. Lower right - evergreen buckthorn, D. Stephens.