

Russian Olive vs. Silverleaf Buffaloberry

(*Elaeagnus angustifolia* vs. *Shepherdia argentea*)



Russian olive is closely related to silveleaf buffaloberry. At first glance these two relatives appear very similar. They grow in common places, have thorns, and can take on shrub-like forms. However, upon closer inspection you will find several differences between these species.

Russian olive (invasive)

VS

Silverleaf Buffaloberry (native)



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Leaves

- Arranged in **alternate** pairs; **useful memory trick: invasive has UNBALANCED arrangement**
- 0.8-4" long and 0.4-1.6" wide
- Upper surface green-gray; lower surface silvery-gray

Flowers

- Yellow, bell shaped flower clusters; appear between May and June
- Insect pollinated
- Male and female flowers on separate plants
- Flowers lack petals and have 4 petal-like sepals and 4 stamens

Fruit

- Newly-formed fruits are silver but become tan or brown as they mature
- Shaped like small olives; contain a single seed
- Eaten by over 50 species of bird or wildlife, 12 of them being game birds

Leaves

- Arranged in **opposite** pairs; **useful memory trick: native has BALANCED arrangement**
- 1-2" long and about 3/8" wide
- Silvery on both top and bottom
- Leaves emerge 1-2 weeks after flowering

Flowers

- Small yellow flower clusters; appear April to mid-late summer
- Insect pollinated; esp. attractive to honey bees and bumble bees
- Male and female flowers on separate plants
- Male flowers are longer (2-3 mm) and have 8 stamens

Fruit

- Fruit yellow or light orange in early summer; turn red later in season
- Fruit drupe shaped; contain single seed
- Important food source for many birds and animals including mule deer, bears, rodents and several bird species



<http://prairieform.com/>



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Thorns

- Terminal thorns on twigs; **alternately** arranged
- Sharp and numerous!

Ecology & Habitat

- Native to Europe and western Asia
- Considered an invasive plant
- 12-45' tall, 4-20" diameter trunks
- Often forms dense thickets
- Does not sprout asexually unless injured or top killed
- Provides some wildlife habitat, but species richness higher in natives
- Can occur from sea level to ~ 8000' elevation

Traditional Uses

- In Iran, the dried powder of the fruit is used mixed with milk to treat rheumatoid arthritis and joint pains
- Flowers have been used traditionally to treat tetanus, among other health problems, including: "bringing people back from their deathbeds"

Thorns

- Terminal thorns; **oppositely** arranged
- Sharp and numerous!

Ecology & Habitat

- Native to N. America
- Important component of riparian ecosystems
- 3.5-20' tall, up to 10" diameter trunks
- Can grow in thickets
- Can sprout vegetatively
- Provides ideal cover and nesting for many species
- Typically grow between ~ 3500-7000' elevation

Traditional Uses

- Native Americans used fruits to treat a variety of health issues
- Fruits also used for beverages, preserves, porridge, sauces, and dried cakes ; Plains Indians often served a sauce made from the berries with bison meat (hence the name buffaloberry)



<http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/>



Matt Lavin; Wikimedia



legendsofamerica.com