

Invasive Buckthorn Revisited

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This last winter when attending the iLandscape conference we listened to a seminar entitled Healthy Hedges. It essentially was teaching how to eradicate weedy species from established hedges in the landscape. This is not a new subject to us so I was surprised at the insights I gained. I have never been accused of being a fan of European Buckthorn, ever. I have always said the only good Buckthorn is a dead Buckthorn. *Landscape* conference we listened to a seminar entitled Healthy Hedges. It essentially was teaching how to eradicate weedy species from established hedges in the landscape. This is not a new subject to us so I was surprised at the insights I gained. I have never been accused of being a fan of European Buckthorn, ever. I have always said the only good Buckthorn is a dead Buckthorn.

I know a lot of our clients are often disturbed when I recommend removing the invasive Buckthorn hedges on their properties. They look at them as great screens from their neighbors. I understand, because I have had to remove copious amounts of Buckthorn on my own property. Those of you that have been out in the Lake County Forest Preserves of late have noticed the massive efforts being made to rid the forests of Buckthorn as well.

The main reason I have always encouraged others and taken my own medicine to remove Buckthorn is because of its *bully* like properties. In other words it has a massively invasive and dense root system and it is one of the first shrubs/trees to get its leaves in the spring and the last to lose them in the fall, so it *out competes* or acts as the neighborhood bully to native wildflowers and other native species. It can also grow to a height of 40' and often does so, inconspicuously destroying all the plants around it. Often those plants are expensive intentionally planted landscape installations. Worse still is the fact that although it was brought to this country from Europe as a landscape plant it has invaded and is destroying most of our forest ecosystems in the Northeastern part of Illinois and beyond.

What I learned, however, is that its evil properties even extend beyond these troublesome issues listed above. The fruit of the Buckthorn, a purplish black berry is readily consumed by our native birds and it makes them sick. It causes diarrhea and can weaken the birds, laying them open to attack from other harmful organisms. If that

This is a drawing that depicts the invasive European Buckthorn. The terminal ends have pointy thorn like structures, as shown.





Invasive European Buckthorn with its
purply black fruit

wasn't enough they also emit toxins from their dense roots and it recently has been discovered that native salamander populations are suffering malformations from these toxic substances. You may say, "I don't really care about the birds that much." and "Who needs more shiny black creatures that I never see?" Well, both the birds and the little salamanders are huge insect consumers. In fact, the salamanders actually are the number one predators of mosquito larvae and birds may consume many times their weight in insects

every day. It is that magical circle of life, where everything is related to everything else. Healthy Buckthorn means a healthy mosquito population, unhealthy forests, unhealthy hedges, unhealthy birds and unhealthy salamanders. So I still say, the only good Buckthorn is a dead Buckthorn.

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