Fact Sheet: Ecology and Control of Privet Species
Ligustrum spp.

Background
As many as nine species of privet (Ligustrum spp.) have been introduced to the U.S. from Europe, North Africa, Asia and Australia since the early 1900s. Most, if not all, privet species, were introduced as ornamentals, and many are still marketed as such today. No privet species are native to North America. Several privet species are reported as invasive throughout the U.S. and at least two, Chinese privet (L. sinense) and border privet (L. obtusifolium) have been reported in Illinois, along with several reports of undistinguished Ligustrum spp. (EDDMapS 2017). In addition, border privet has been reported in every county in neighboring Indiana. It is likely that these species are underreported in Illinois. You can help by reporting sightings of these species to EDDMapS online or EDDMapS Midwest phone application.

Identification and Ecology
Privet species can be easily identified to the genus level, but it can be difficult to identify to species level. Privets are characterized as a small tree or a large shrub growing up to 30 feet, but typically around 3-12 feet in height. Their leaves as a group are distinct in that they are simple, have an opposite leaf arrangement, and have entire margins. Similar species include the non-native bush honeysuckles (Lonicera spp.) and the native coralberry (Symphoricarpos orbiculatus) that also have simple, opposite and entire leaves. However, stems of bush honeysuckle are hollow, unlike privet and coralberry. Also, the bark of coralberry resembles the bark of bush honeysuckle (light tan and stringy), but does not resemble the bark of privet species (gray and smooth). In addition, the fruits and flowers among these potential look-alikes are dissimilar. Privet fruits are green turning blue-black when mature and about a quarter inch wide, bush honeysuckle fruits are typically glossy red and softer than coralberry fruits, which are duller red in color and denser.
Identification and Ecology Continued
Privet species can invade diverse habitats with a wide range of soil and light conditions, but they generally prefer mesic soils and greater amounts of sunlight. Privet has been known to spread rapidly from both root sprouts and from seed. It can overrun natural areas and pastures with dense stands outcompeting or shading out other plant species. Birds eat the fruits and disperse the seeds into new areas. Rare plant species are threatened by the proliferation of privet in some locations. In addition, berries from privet species are poisonous to humans and can cause a variety of ailments if accidentally ingested. Research suggests management of this species can lead to greater diversity of bees, butterflies, and native plants for up to five years after control (Hanula & Horn 2011, Hudson, Hanula, & Horn 2014).

Management
Like most invasive plants, privet spp. can best be controlled through an integrated pest management plan. Seedlings can be hand-pulled. Prescribed fire can be used to control seedlings, and prepare for other treatments, such as foliar application of herbicides on resprouts following top-kill by fire. Land managers have successfully treated privet using typical woody species herbicide treatments such as cut-stump, basal bark, and foliar herbicide applications. Those treatments include cut stumps using glyphosate (50-100% v/v solution) or triclopyr ester (18-25% v/v solution). Also, basal bark methods using concentrated triclopyr ester (18-25% solution in bark oil carrier) are effective. Smaller stem plants can be treated with a foliar treatment of 5% v/v triclopyr amine or 2% v/v glyphosate while the plants are actively growing. A 2% solution of glyphosate or 2% triclopyr with a one-half percent of non-ionic surfactant is reportedly effective for treating Chinese privet (Bartlow et al. 1997). Since many privet species have prolonged growing seasons, a foliar application of herbicide in the early spring or late fall may be useful in avoiding non-target plants that would be dormant at that time.

For more information, please see the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area website at www.rtrcwma.org or email us at rtrcwma@gmail.com

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References
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