

Glossy Buckthorn

Frangula alnus Mill.

Alternate Latin name: *Rhamnus frangula* L.

Alternate common names: Shining Buckthorn; Fen Buckthorn; European Buckthorn (also a common name of *Rhamnus cathartica*); European Alder (don't confuse with Alderleaf Buckthorn [*Rhamnus alnifolia*])

- **shrub** or small tree; **bark has prominent white lenticels** (*raised corky areas*)
- **leaves generally alternate**, 1"-3" long, with **8-9 pairs of veins**; **margins not toothed**
- **leaves glossy**, may be hairy on the underside, especially on the midvein (use hand lens)
- **leaf veins curve up** to follow the leaf edges **and stand out on the leaf underside**
- **tiny flowers**, each with **5 whitish or greenish petals**; flowers come out of leaf axils
- branches may have **both flowers and fruit at the same time**
- **fruit** is a drupe (**berry-like**) with 2-3 not-grooved seeds; eaten by birds, but **poisonous** to humans
- fruit first ripens mid-summer, but flowers continue to be produced so **branches may bear fruit in different stages of ripeness (green, reddish, or purplish-black)**
- **buds are rust-colored and naked** (*covered with a shriveled up leaf instead of scales*)
- **branches finely hairy at the tips** (on the last 1/2" — use hand lens)
- **inner bark is yellow**

Glossy Buckthorn has **no spines or thorns**. It grows in shade but does best in sun. It is particularly invasive at wetland margins or on limey soils. The **deciduous leaves** remain into late Fall, turning a light green or yellow **color that stands out in the forest understory**. In New England, don't confuse with the **native shrub, Alderleaf Buckthorn** (*Rhamnus alnifolia* L'Her.), which does have alternate leaves with 8-9 pairs of veins, but the **leaves are toothed**, leaf surfaces are puckered (like seer-sucker fabric), and the buds are scaly (not naked).



Text and photos by: Charlotte Pyle, October 2002