



Asian bittersweet



American bittersweet

Photo credit: Minnesota DNR

# BCK CISMA NEWSLETTER

## October 2018



Barry • Calhoun • Kalamazoo  
**BCKCISMA**  
Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area

## BCK CISMA THIS MONTH IN NUMBERS

- 1 Survey/Detection
- 9 Local Outreach Efforts
- 139 People reached

### Oriental Bittersweet

Fall is here! The leaves are changing and will start to drop. While you are out with the crunch of leaves under your feet, keep your eyes peeled for this month's spotlight invader: Oriental bittersweet.

This woody vine is native to Asia. Depending on nearby structures and vegetation Oriental bittersweet can climb 60 feet high and reach four inches in diameter. Oriental bittersweet is very shade-tolerant. Infestations are common in grasslands and wooded areas, especially woodland edges. Other popular locations are disturbed areas like along roadways, trail paths and fence rows.



Above: Oriental bittersweet is often used in fall home decorations, but can wreak havoc on the land.  
Right: Opt for a festive native species like Michigan holly instead!

Its round leaves are finely toothed and alternate on the vine. You can easily identify both Oriental and American bittersweets by their red fleshy fruit. The fruit has an outer skin that is green in the summer and yellow-orange in the fall. As the skin changes color it will break open to reveal the colorful fruit, that often remains on the vines through the winter.

American bittersweet, however, is a wonderful native plant with lots of benefits. So how do you tell the difference between the two? American bittersweet has fewer fruits, which are located in clusters at the end of the stems. Oriental bittersweet, diversely, is usually chock-full of fruits, which are located all along the stems.

Like many invasive species, Oriental bittersweet prevents the growth of native species by its ability to spread rapidly. Its roots can spread underground and create new stems. The seeds are viable and can be spread great distances by birds and mammals. Once established the vine will climb nearby trees, reducing the trees photosynthesis and eventually



suffocating the tree to death. Oriental bittersweet also has the ability to hybridize the native species American bittersweet. When hybridization occurs between a native and an invasive, the native species is at a genetic disadvantage.

October is the best time to look for Oriental bittersweet. In the fall, its leaves will turn yellow and remain on the vine, after most native plants have dropped their leaves. When the leaves do drop, Oriental bittersweet can still be identified by the yellow-orange skin that has pilled open to display its red fruit.

To prevent spread, never use Oriental bittersweet for seasonal decorations. A safer option for crafting is Michigan holly. Michigan holly can be easily distinguished from bittersweets because it is a shrub (whereas bittersweet is a vine) and the berries of Michigan holly do not have a yellow/orange outer skin encasing them.

To control Oriental bittersweet, cut the vines, allow them to regrow, and then spray the regrowth with herbicide. Improper treatment can cause spread. BCK Cisma is dedicated to curbing the spread of invasive species in Barry, Calhoun and Kalamazoo Counties. If you have Oriental bittersweet or other invasive species concerns within those counties please contact Fallon Januska at [fallon.januska@macd.org](mailto:fallon.januska@macd.org) or 269-908-4136.