



# Invasive Plant Alert<sup>1</sup>

## Thorny Olive

*Eleaegnus pungens* Thunb.

*Eleaegnus pungens* is spreading throughout the Southeast from Kentucky and Virginia south to Louisiana and Florida. It is spread by animal-dispersed seeds.

### Where to Look

This shrub was introduced from China and Japan in 1830 as an ornamental. It has been planted in hedgerows and along highway medians and has been used to revegetate surface mine sites in southern states. It is still planted as an ornamental.

In its native habitat it is primarily seen in open areas below 3300 feet. It tolerates shade, drought and salt. In southeastern United States, thorny olive has been reported in shaded woodlands as well as open disturbed sites. It occurs as far north as Massachusetts.



Figure 1 *E. pungens*. James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

### Identifying the Plant

Thorny olive is a fast-growing, dense woody shrub that can grow from 3 to 25 feet in height, with multiple stems and shoots that can hook onto other plants and climb

into trees. It is an evergreen with thick alternate leaves, oval to elliptic (0.4 – 4.0 in. long and 0.2 to 2.0 in. wide), with irregular and wavy margins. The blade surface is silvery in spring, turning dark or brownish green and is silvery underneath. The bark is dark and rough with projecting thorns.

Flower clusters are produced in the fall with 1-3 fragrant flowers (0.4 in. long). Flowers are silvery white to brown and tubular with four lobes.

*E. pungens* produces fruit between March and June, as an oblong juicy drupe (0.4 inch) containing one nutlet. It is whitish and ripens to red and is finely dotted with brown scales with a shriveled calyx tube at the tip.



Figure 2 *E. pungens* fruit. James H. Miller & Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, Bugwood.org

### How to get rid of it?

Thorny olive has a rapid growth habit. Restricting its sale and use

for landscape and roadside plantings would aid in control.

Mechanical controls include cutting, girdling and hand pulling. Cutting at ground level is most effective when trees have begun to flower and before seed production. Plants will re-sprout. Girdling can be used on large trees. Hand pulling is effective with seedlings. Foliar, cut stump, and basal bark methods have all worked.

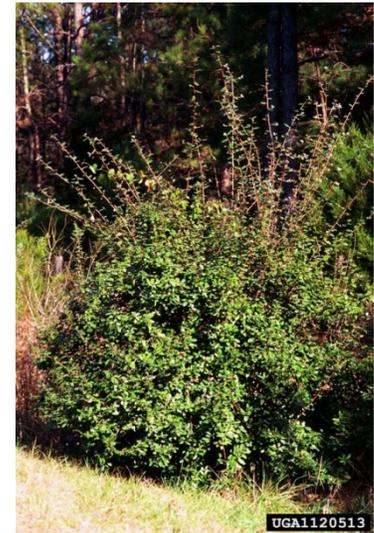


Figure 3 Thorny Olive. James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

### Resources

TN Exotic Pest Plant Council, [http://www.tneppc.org/invasive\\_plants/55](http://www.tneppc.org/invasive_plants/55)

Gucker, Corey L. 2011. *Eleaegnus pungens*. In: Fire effects Information System, [Online]. USDA, Forest Service. <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/> [2012, June 27].

<sup>1</sup> This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region