Invasive Plant Alert[1]

Birch-leaf pear

Pyrus betulifolia Bunge.

Pyrus betulifolia is not listed as an accepted name on http://www.itis.gov/ but was listed as accepted on http://www.tropicos.org/. Pyrus taxonomy is complex and there may be some uncertainty as to which species is which.

This fast-growing species hybridizes readily with other invasive pear species and may provide increased hardiness to hybrid offspring.

Where to Look

In its native China, birch-leaf pear is found from tropical to temperate regions. In the US, it can survive winters as far north as New England. It can tolerate a wide range of moisture and light conditions, but prefers full sun and sandy, dry soils. It is tolerant of drought and air pollution.

Figure 1 Fruit. Postman, J., USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Birch-leaf pear was first introduced to the US in 1882. It is widely cultivated as a pollen source for commercial pear trees and as rootstock for grafted trees. Naturalized hybrids with Callery pears have been reported in the American Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LS, MS, MO, NC, TN).

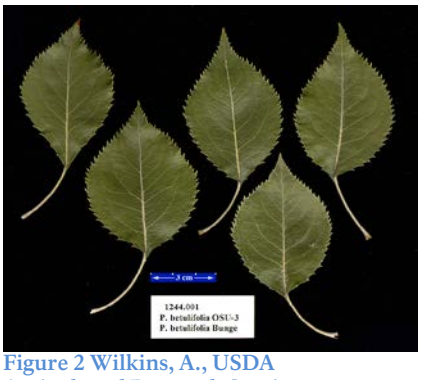

Figure 2 Wilkins, A., USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Identifying the Plant

Birch-leaf pear is a fast-growing, perennial tree. Branches often bear spines. The leaves have sharply serrate margins with a pointed tip, which distinguishes birch-leaf pear from other pear species. The leaves are paired, grey-green in spring when they emerge, and when mature are dark green, glossy, and 2-4 inches long.

The tree flowers in spring before the leaves have emerged, producing clusters of small, white, 5-petaled flowers that are about 0.75 inches across. Fruits appear in August, round fruits ½ inch in diameter, brown with white spots, on 2-3 inch stems. Fruits are eaten by birds, so seeds may be bird-dispersed.

How to get rid of it?

Cutting back the tree will result in the production of suckers, so root systems should be physically removed or treated with herbicide if possible. No biological controls have been investigated for this plant, as it is an important agricultural species, but it is susceptible to fire blight.

Figure 3 Postman, J., USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Resources:

Flora of China. http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=242411034

Tropicos.org. Missouri Botanical Garden. 25 Jun 2012 http://www.tropicos.org

Flower & Garden Magazine / Feb-March, 1996 http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1082/is_n1_v40/ai_17907651/

[1] This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region

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Written by Emmi Felker-Quinn, edited by Mark Frey