

# ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET



- **NOTE:** Because Oriental bittersweet can be confused with our native American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) which is becoming less and less common, it is imperative that correct identification be made before any control is begun. American bittersweet produces flowers (and fruits) in single terminal panicles at the tips of the stems; flower panicles and fruit clusters are about as long as the leaves; the leaves are nearly twice as long as wide and are tapered at each end. Oriental bittersweet produces flowers in small axillary clusters that are shorter than the subtending leaves and the leaves are very rounded. Comparing the two, American bittersweet has fewer, larger clusters of fruits whereas Oriental bittersweet is a prolific fruiter with lots and lots of fruit clusters emerging at many points along the stem. Unfortunately, hybrids of the two occur which may make identification more difficult.

## ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET

Oriental bittersweet is a deciduous woody perennial plant which grows as a climbing vine and a trailing shrub. Stems of older plants 4 inches in diameter have been reported. The leaves are alternate, glossy, nearly as wide as they are long (round), with finely toothed margins. There are separate female (fruiting) and male (non-fruiting) plants. Female plants produce clusters of small greenish flowers in axillary clusters (from most leaf axils), and each plant can produce large numbers of fruits and seeds. The fruits are three-valved, yellow, globular capsules that at maturity split open to reveal three red-orange, fleshy arils each containing one or two seeds. The abundance of showy fruits have made Oriental bittersweet extremely popular for use in floral arrangement.

## ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Oriental bittersweet is a vigorously growing vine that climbs over and smothers vegetation which may die from excessive shading or breakage. When bittersweet climbs high up on trees the increased weight can lead to uprooting and blow-over during high winds and heavy snowfalls. In addition, Oriental bittersweet is displacing our native American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) through competition and hybridization.

Oriental bittersweet has been reported to be invasive in natural areas in Michigan as well as 21 other states. For more complete information look at <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/ceor1.htm>