

Oriental vs American Bittersweet: Winter identification using fruit characteristics

Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is an aggressive, invasive vine that is regulated in Illinois by the Illinois Exotic Weed Act (525 ILCS 10/). Its dense growth can girdle trees, break limbs, shade out shrubs and saplings, and outcompete native species. American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) is a somewhat uncommon native vine that typically does not form the dense stands, cause severe damage to trees, or displace native species. Being able to distinguish the two species is important before applying management. In winter, fruit characteristics present on female plants can be used to determine correct identification.

Both bittersweet species are dioecious, with separate male and female plants. Female plants bear fruit that, when ripe, split open to reveal a dark red, three-parted fruit. The two species differ in the size and location of the fruit and the color of the capsule (fruit covering).

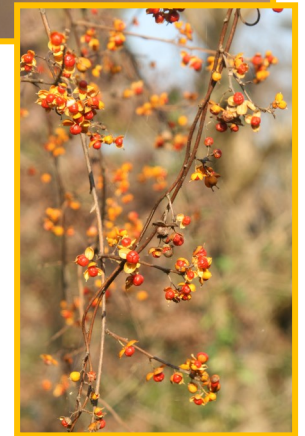
Oriental bittersweet has smaller fruit that are located in small clusters in the leaf axils along the length of the stem. Fruit capsules are yellow-orange in color.

American bittersweet has slightly larger fruit that are located in terminal clusters (at the end of the vines). Fruit capsules are dark orange to reddish in color.

Oriental Bittersweet

Yellow-orange capsules

Axillary fruit



American Bittersweet

Dark orange-reddish capsules

Terminal fruit

