



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Elaeagnus pungens*¹

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Introduction

The underside of the glossy, grey-green leaves is an attractive silver color with brown dots, and the young growth is covered with silvery scales (Fig. 1). Some cultivars have variegated foliage. The small, highly fragrant, ivory-white flower clusters appear in winter and early spring, followed in late spring by red, edible fruits that are popular with birds.

General Information

Scientific name: *Elaeagnus pungens*

Pronunciation: el-lee-AG-nus PUN-jenz

Common name(s): Silverthorn, Thorny Elaeagnus

Family: *Elaeagnaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 10 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: screen; hedge; mass planting; reclamation plant; espalier

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 10 to 20 feet

Spread: 10 to 15 feet

Plant habit: spreading

Plant density: dense

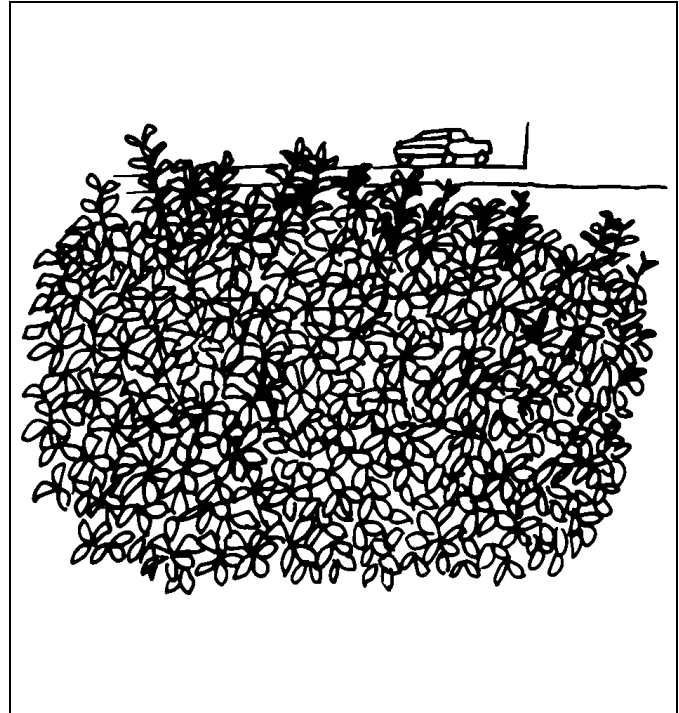


Figure 1. Silverthorn.

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf shape: ovate

Leaf venation: none, or difficult to see

Leaf type and persistence: semi-evergreen

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: pleasant fragrance; winter flowering; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit cover: fleshy

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristic: suited for human consumption; rarely fruits

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: thorns present; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: brown

Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun

Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam

Drought tolerance: high

Soil salt tolerances: good

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: aggressive, spreading plant

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

This rapidly growing, very large, spreading, evergreen shrub thrives in full sun to partial shade, in hot, windy locations, and is highly salt tolerant. It is especially effective as a hedge but requires frequent pruning because of its rampant growth. It can be pruned into formal shapes but is best used along highways and in other large, open spaces because of the sprawling habit of growth. It is often seen in mass plantings spaced five to eight feet apart.

Not particular as to soil type, Russian-Olive needs some watering only until established. No additional irrigation is generally needed afterward.

Available cultivars include: 'Fruitland', with slightly larger leaves, wavy and silvery beneath; 'Maculata', glossy leaves with yellow centers, brilliant winter color; and 'Simonii', large leaves with silvery undersides, sometimes variegated yellow and pinkish-white.

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings.

Its problems include mites, scale, and micronutrient deficiencies, but these rarely require attention. Its rampant growth rate is considered a problem, especially when used in small areas.

Pests and Diseases

No diseases are of major concern.



Figure 3. Foliage of Silverthorn