



Rhamnus caroliniana Carolina Buckthorn¹

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INTRODUCTION

Carolina Buckthorn develops an open crown of many slender branches and is usually seen at 12 to 15 feet in height although it is capable of reaching 40 feet in a partially shaded location (Fig. 1). The bright green, deciduous leaves change to a gorgeous orange/yellow or red in autumn before dropping. The fairly inconspicuous, early summer flowers are greenish-white and followed by small, showy red fruits which ripen to black in the fall when their flesh becomes sweet and edible. Birds find the fruits irresistible. The thin, smooth bark is gray with dark markings. Carolina Buckthorn is quite attractive in the landscape and is one of the first fruiting plants to show color.

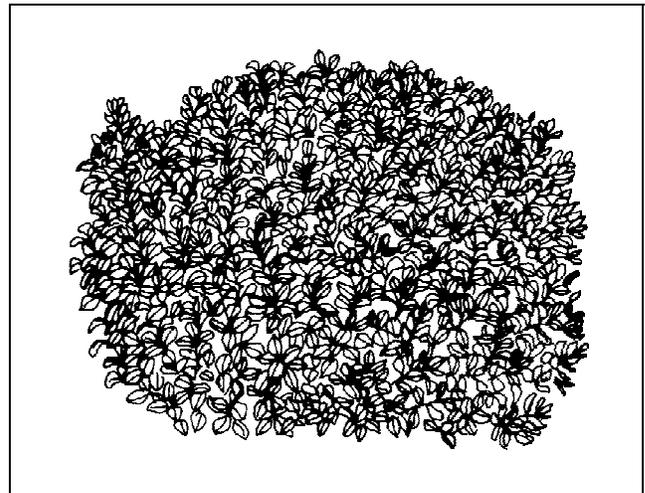


Figure 1. Young Carolina Buckthorn.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Rhamnus caroliniana*
Pronunciation: RAM-nus kair-oh-lin-ee-AY-nuh
Common name(s): Carolina Buckthorn
Family: *Rhamnaceae*
USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 9 (Fig. 2)
Origin: native to North America
Uses: container or above-ground planter; hedge; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; trainable as a standard; specimen; no proven urban tolerance
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 12 to 15 feet
Spread: 10 to 15 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: oval
Crown density: open
Growth rate: medium
Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire; serrulate
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); oblong
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: orange; red

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: black; red

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; suited for human consumption; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in the shade; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline; well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

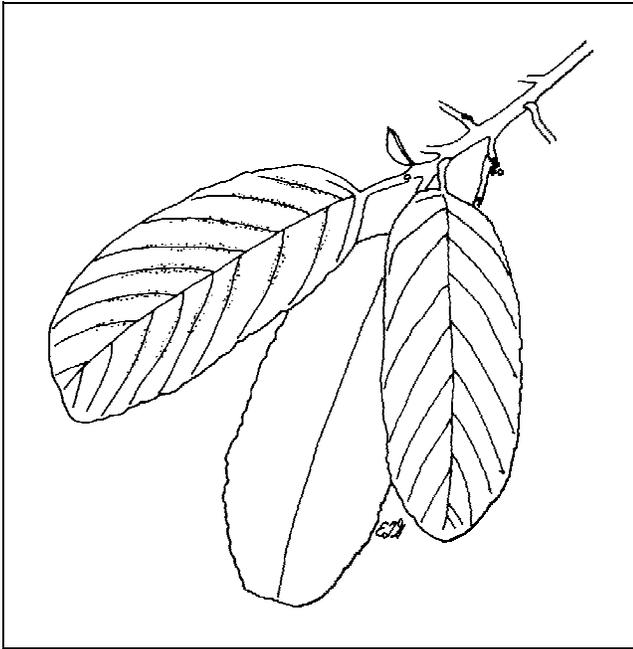


Figure 3. Foliage of Carolina Buckthorn.

Diseases

Susceptible to crown rust of oaks. A leaf spot will occasionally infect the tree but is of no consequence.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Use this small tree or large shrub in a shrub border to attract birds and for a late summer accent. It can be planted in mass to form a thicket which should provide food and cover for a variety of wildlife. It might also be tried as a street tree where overhead space is restricted by power lines.

Carolina Buckthorn should be grown in full sun on well-drained soil, acid or alkaline. It is moderately drought-tolerant.

Propagation is by seed.

Pests

No pests are of major concern.