

OCTOBER HORTICULTURE NOTES

Oriental Bittersweet

Celastrus orbiculatus. For many years, I have cut down branches of this colorful vine for autumn decoration. And I am not the only one to admire its beauty. My best friend makes wreaths from it. Another friend was proudly showing me her shady backyard “jungle,” which was actually many oriental bittersweet vines in the process of strangling all of her mature trees but providing a temporary “jungle” which was cool and shady during the hot summer. By then I had already learned that this vine was the reason that I had lost some of my native red maples. It had twined itself around branches and grown up through the canopy of the trees, eventually strangling the branches and the tree. It does not discriminate against the invasive Norway maples, either. It is relentless and very dangerous. Therefore, tonight I shall tell you how I have eradicated most of the oriental bittersweet in my back yard and how you can do the same.

It is actually quite easy and pretty much safe for birds and other plants nearby. You first have to locate the roots of this plant. The fall is the best time to do this because the roots are big and strong after a summer with the leaves sending back lots of nourishing sugar to fortify it for the winter. Cut back the branches as close to the root as possible. Then, wearing gloves and using an old sponge soaked with glyphosate, which is basically what is in Roundup, dab it on the cut end of the root. It will be absorbed into the root, to the very tip of each root hair, and kill the plant totally. This process will not harm any plant growing around it. It will not hurt any birds. It will eradicate that particular plant. It is quick and easy.

If you really love the plant, you could replace it with our American bittersweet, *Celastrus scandens*. It is highly recommended by the experts as having equally beautiful autumn berries and lovely yellow foliage, but it is not as rampant as its Asian counterpart. It does require frequent pruning to keep it in bounds, however. They also recommend another native alternative, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* also known as Virginia creeper. It has flaming autumn color and smoky-blue berries. It also has holdfasts, or feet, that cling to walls and can damage mortar. It does well in shade but produces less fruit.



Oriental bittersweet hugs tree trunks and branches, eventually strangling them.





The leaves of oriental bittersweet vine.



Virginia creeper.

