

Elaeagnus angustifolia

(Russian Olive)



Flowering Russian-olive



© J.S. Peterson
Russian-olive



Elizabeth J. Crapata
Russian-olive leaves



Russian-olive fruit

Introduction

The Russian-olive is native to southern Europe and western Asia. It was first introduced into the U.S. around the late 1800s. Used primarily in Europe as an ornamental plant, the tree was actively promoted for years in the U.S. as an [effective tool](#) for windbreaks, soil stabilization, and wildlife habitat improvement. The tree however quickly escaped into the wild and developed a reputation as an [invasive species](#). The Russian-olive has aromatic flowers and contains fruit which is a favorite among birds.

Description

The [Russian-olive](#) is a small, thorny shrub that may grow to 30 feet in height. The stems, leaves, and buds have a distinct characteristic of having a silvery appearance. The leaves are egg shaped around 1-3 inches long. Russian-olives begin to flower at three years of age. The flowers are highly aromatic, and have a yellow color. The flowers are replaced by an abundant cluster of silvery fruit.

Distribution

The distribution of the Russian-olive in [Utah](#) occurs along riparian zones: streams, fields and open areas near mountainous regions. Its distribution in the [U.S.](#) is very similar. Russian-olives can tolerate high elevations ranging from: 810 to 2,090 meters.

Ecology

The Russian-olive has a life expectancy of 20-30 years. Seedlings are tolerant of shade and varying moisture conditions. It is a tree capable of living in extremely dry, wet and high salinity soils. The Russian-olive has the unique ability to [fix nitrogen](#) in its roots, thus giving it the capability to grow on bare, mineral substrates.