Rhamnus caroliniana
Carolina Buckthorn

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

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.

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
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches; 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: orange; red
Fall characteristic: showy

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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
Diseases

Susceptible to crown rust of oats. 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.