

INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES OF VIRGINIA

SPECIES COMMON NAMES:

Small-leaf Privet, Chinese Privet

SCIENTIFIC NAME:

Ligustrum sinense

Threat

The dark, glossy foliage of small-leaf privet (*Ligustrum sinense*) is easily recognizable to many gardeners because of its frequent use in landscaping. Unfortunately, land managers also recognize it as one of the most common invasive plants throughout the Southeastern United States. The plant was introduced into North America in the mid-1800s, and was discovered growing outside cultivation by the early 1900s.

Small-leaf privet forms dense, impenetrable thickets that outcompete native vegetation, reduce diversity and prevent other species from regenerating. Birds eat small-leaf privet fruit, which helps spread seeds over long distances and allows the plant to invade areas where it was previously absent.

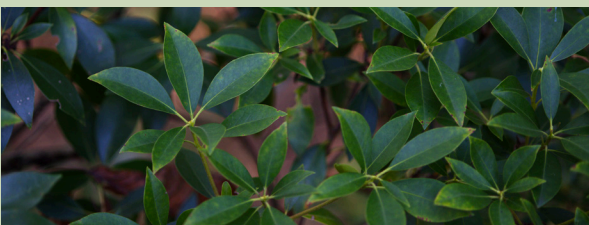
NATIVE ALTERNATIVES

Choosing a native shrub instead of small-leaf privet is a great way to support wildlife and protect the natural world.

The native **mountain laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*) is an excellent alternative. Mountain laurel is evergreen, has beautiful white or pink flowers in the spring, and grows to a similar height. The plant is considered native throughout the state.

In the eastern part of the state, another great evergreen option native to that range is **southern bayberry** (*Morella cerifera*). In the western portion of the state, consider an evergreen **rhododendron** (*Rhododendron* spp.).

Mountain laurel



Report Sightings

If you believe you have found a wild occurrence of small-leaf privet, you can assist in conservation efforts by reporting your finding. Collect complete location information including coordinates if possible. Take clear photos of the plant from a distance and up close. Detailed images of leaves, flowers and fruit are particularly helpful. Reports can be emailed directly to invasive.species@dc.virginia.gov or reported online through the Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (EDDMapS). Reports can also be made on a smartphone using the free EDDMapS or iNaturalist apps.

Description

Small-leaf privet is a semi-evergreen shrub or small tree that can reach heights upwards of about 30 feet. Mature plants have smooth, gray-brown bark, while young twigs are brown and typically hairy. Leaves are smooth, opposite-branched, glossy and typically dark green, with a distinct vein down the middle. They are oval-shaped with a rounded tip and relatively small, typically not exceeding 1 3/4 inches in length. In the spring, small-leaf privet produces white flower clusters on the ends of branches. Many consider the flower fragrance unpleasant. These flower clusters mature into dark purple or blue berry clusters that mature in the fall and persist through winter.



