Asiatic Bittersweet  Vine
*Celastrus orbiculatus*

Deciduous vine that twines about a support, up to 30’ long. Aggressively grows over trees and other vegetation, telephone poles.

**Where found:** Forest edges; fencerows, roadsides, abandoned fields. Also found in open woods.

Leaves alternate and of varied shape — often oval with pointed tip, 2 – 5 “ long. Petioles up to 1” long.

Leaves turn yellow in autumn.

Stems round, hairless, light to dark brown, with noticeable lenticels (bumps)

Flowers greenish-yellow, growing in clusters from the joints between leaves and stems.

Fruits pea-sized capsules turning from green to bright yellow; when ripe, capsules split open to reveal bright red-orange berry.

Roots bright orange on outside.

**Similar native plant:** American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) — leaves twice as long as wide; flowers & fruits are clustered at end of stems (not in the joints between leaves and stems).

Harpwell Invasive Plants Partnership, 2015 (4/2015)
[Sources: Maine Invasive Plants, bulletin #2506; M. Dirr, *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*]
**Asiatic Bittersweet (Celastrus orbiculatus) Best Control Practices:**
First, read the FAQs (see last page) to guide your decisions on How, When, Why, and What control efforts. Then, proceed with the following:

- **Low growth:** Pull/grub/dig/weed-wrench anytime the soil is wet. Repeat 2X/month until no re-sprouting. Expect 10 years to eradicate. (Mowing stimulates root growth.)
- **Mature vine:** Cut in spring only to prevent seed production; then re-cut late summer or fall when over 32 degrees, and paint cut stems with herbicide, if permitted: Use 25% glyphosate immediately, or triclopyr. Repeat following year. Spray leaf re-sprouts with 5% triclopyr.

**Note:**
Glyphosate is not effective on leaves. Also, cutting stimulates root sprouting if no herbicide is used.

**Sources:**
- Casco Bay Invasive Species Network, Winning the War on Weeds
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory, Invasive Species Best Control Practices: Oriental Bittersweet
FAQs: To eliminate or control invasive plants in Harpswell?

Choosing a control strategy
Choosing a control strategy requires careful thought as to the size and severity of the infestation and its proximity to water and other natural resources. The Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP) urges land owners to use mechanical (as opposed to chemical) controls whenever possible. Herbicide application within 25 feet of the water is not allowed in Harpswell. Check the Town of Harpswell’s Pesticide Ordinance.

Why control invasive plants?
Infestations of invasive plants damage the lands and waters that native plants and animals need to survive. They out-compete and displace native plant species. Livestock avoid grazing on many invasives (thistles/euphorbia, black swallow-wort), encouraging spread. Invasive seeds may also contaminate hay. Some invasives shelter mice, so increase the numbers of ticks (barberries), and others yield poisonous chemicals (euphorbia, black swallow-wort) that can affect human and animal health. Some invasive roots exude chemicals that poison neighboring plants (knapweed, black swallow-wort).

When is the best time to control invasive plants?
There isn’t one season that works perfectly for all invasives. When trying to prevent invasives from entering the seed-spreading period, manually attack them any time you can. But, when chemicals are needed, leaf-spraying must be done on green leaves, while the cut-and-paint stem applications are only effective during the late season, not when sap is actively flowing. Be sure to follow the guidelines advised on HIPP’s website to time your efforts.

Why avoid chemical herbicides?
The most commonly-used herbicides for invasive plant control are glyphosate (Roundup) and Triclopyr (Garlon 4 and 3A). Glyphosate is known to be mildly toxic to bees, which are already threatened. Triclopyr is slightly toxic to birds, fish, and aquatic invertebrates, and can cause severe eye damage.

Why use chemicals?
Sometimes, cautiously using herbicides is less disturbing to the environment than other possible control methods. At other times, the plant infestation is too large or dense to realistically remove mechanically. If chemicals are needed, follow professional advice for when and how much chemical to use. Using chemicals that are mixed too strongly can damage the visible leaves while never seeping into the root structure to kill the plant.

When using chemicals why not just use Roundup (or Triclopyr) for all the invasives?
Neither Roundup nor Triclopyr works reliably for every invasive plant. Following the guidelines advised on HIPP’s website will help you choose the right herbicide for the job, save you money, and minimize environmental damage.