

Rhamnaceae

buckthorn family

Nova Scotia hosts only three species of the 900 found worldwide, in 55 genera. Shrubs or trees, they have simple leaves which may be alternate or opposite. Flowers are small and regular, 4–5-merous, producing a drupe in our species. Unisexual or perfect, they are perigynous. Stamens oppose the petals, both alternating with the sepals and equal in number to them. The fruit is inedible and may be toxic.

Key to species

Leaves alternate; petals 5; winter buds scaleless; never thorny.

Frangula

Leaves opposite or alternate; petals 4; winter buds with scales; thorns present or absent.

Rhamnus

***Frangula* Mill.**

Frangula is often included with *Rhamnus* as a subgenus. North America is home to seven species and a hybrid. Species are deciduous or evergreen throughout the temperate and subtropical regions. Leaves are always alternate and often shiny; their veins strongly crimping the leaves and curving towards the apices. Shrubs have no spines. Some may become invasive outside of their range.

***Frangula alnus* Mill.**

(=*Rhamnus frangula* L.)

Glossy Buckthorn; nerprun bourdaine



Photo by Sean Blaney

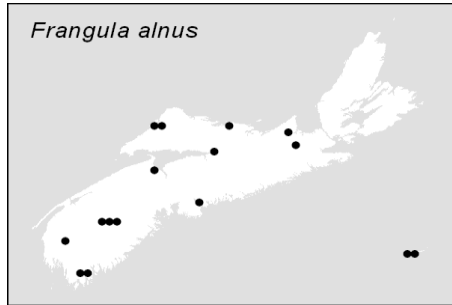
This is a large shrub with glossy leaves, ovate, oblong or elliptic in outline. They are entire on the margins and bear 7–8 pairs of veins. Small white flowers develop into red berries, that ripen black and are dispersed by birds.

Flowers in June.

Grows along edges and in thickets. Found in cut-overs. It is invasive into swampy forests.



Photo by Martin Thomas



Scattered throughout the mainland, especially from Annapolis to Colchester and Cumberland Co. This species is highly invasive.

Ranges from NS to SK, variously south to TN. Introduced from Eurasia.

Rhamnus L. **buckthorns**

Flowers greenish white, staminate or pistillate, arise from the leaf axils singly or in clusters. Staminate flowers may have a vestigial pistil and pistillate flowers may bear reduced stamens. Petals present or absent. Leaves distinctly veined, either palmate or pinnately arranged.

Key to species

Petals absent; sepals and stamens 5; seeds 3.

Rhamnus alnifolia

Petals present; sepals and stamens 4; seeds 2 or 4.

R. cathartica

***Rhamnus alnifolia* L'Hér.**

Alder-leaved Buckthorn; nerprun à feuilles d'aulne



Photo by David Mazerolle

Commonly, this shrub is less than 1m in height. The alternate leaves are acute and serrulate, ovate or lanceolate, bearing 4–5 pairs of veins.

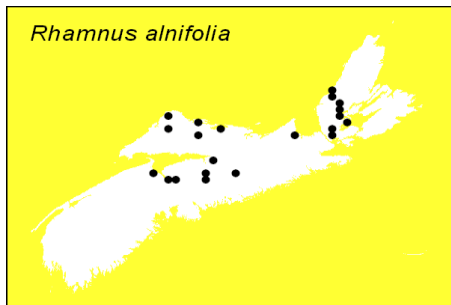
Flowers from mid-May to June.

Grows in wooded swamps or bogs, meadows or alluvial soils in the alkaline regions.

Scattered in Hants and Cumberland counties and in southern Inverness Co.

Elsewhere it ranges from NF to BC, south to CA and TN.

Of conservation concern, YELLOW-listed.



***Rhamnus cathartica* L.**

Common Buckthorn; nerprun cathartique



Photo by Martin Thomas

A shrub or small tree, this introduced species may bear thorns distally on new wood. Leaves are opposite and broadly elliptic; small sharp point at the apex. Veins are in 2–3 pairs, curving towards the tip. Margins are serrulate. Flowers bear yellowish-green petals.

Flowers late May to early June.



Photo by Sean Blaney

Fallow fields and open woods.

Formerly planted as a hedgerow, now escaped throughout the northern part of the province, from Digby to Antigonish.

Ranges from NS to AB, south to UT and NC; CA.

Introduced from Europe and bird-dispersed. Now being eradicated as a threat to cereal crops. It is an alternate host for crown rusts, fungal infections.

