

American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*)

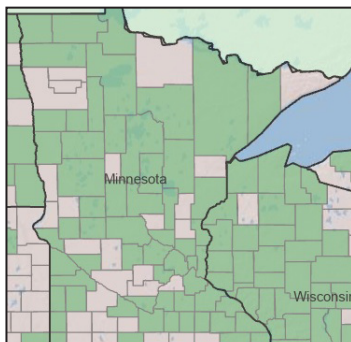
Family: Staff-tree (*Celastraceae*)

DESCRIPTION: Loosely twining American bittersweet vines — “scandens” means “to climb” in Latin — are a deciduous species that sprawl when unsupported. The species produces glossy green foliage. Its bright orange fruits are eye-catching when set against snow. Its seeds are dispersed by birds. It can grow in habitats ranging from rocky slopes to woodlands and prairies.

USES: Fruits provide winter forage for birds, fox and squirrels. Rabbits and deer browse on the woody stems and branches. Tiny but fragrant flowers attract many species of native pollinators. The colorful arils and the berry-like fruits they surround are used in floral arrangements and wreaths.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Minnesota Seasons](#)
Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota,
Welby R. Smith
[The Morton Arboretum](#)



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Photo Credit: MDA

**STATEWIDE
WETLAND
INDICATOR STATUS:**
FACU

ID: Alternate, dark green, oval leaves with pointed tips grow up to 4 inches long and half as wide. Clusters of tiny green-white flowers bloom in May and June at branches' tips. In July, female plants produce fruits with green husks, which turn orange and split open as they ripen. On older stems, the thin bark peels and turns from green to gray. Vines can grow up to 60 feet tall with a stem up to 2.5 inches in diameter.

SIMILAR

SPECIES: Round leaf bittersweet, (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), formerly called oriental bittersweet, is an invasive, noxious weed regulated by the [Minnesota Department of Agriculture](#). The invasive's fruit has yellow husks with red berries; its fruit and flowers occur at the leaf axils. The invasive can displace and/or hybridize with the native species.

Planting Recommendations

American bittersweet can add color and height to a garden when it climbs a trellis, fence or tree. It thrives in full sun and average-to-moist soils, but adapts to many growing conditions. In partial shade, it produces fewer flowers. Easily propagated, the vine can be started from seed or cuttings. Seeds should be collected in the fall. Because they require at least 120 days of cold, moist stratification to germinate, seeds should be sown at a shallow depth in fall or stratified

in a refrigerator. Cuttings will be genetically identical to the parent plant. It's possible to propagate from vine tips with a 5-inch-long softwood cutting in the summer or a 10-inch-long hardwood cutting in winter. Because it's a dioecious plant with separate male and female plants, one of each is required to produce fruit. American bittersweet may unintentionally be sold as a similar-looking invasive species; make sure to acquire plants from a reputable source.

Developed by Maggie Barnick, a noxious weed specialist with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

