

# Rhamnus alaternus

## COMMON NAMES

Italian evergreen buckthorn

## BIOSTATUS

Exotic

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## FLOWER COLOURS

Green

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Evergreen shrub to approx. 5m high, often < 1m in exposed sites. Shoots angular, hairy, usually purple when young. Stipules subulate. Petiole 3-11mm long, hairy, at least on upper side. The leaves are leathery, often toothed glossy and oval to about 6cm long. The flowers are small, green and fragrant. The berry is up to 7mm long, broad, ovoid, glossy red becoming black with a stone.

## SIMILAR TAXA

May be confused with *Melicytus novae-zelandiae* (endemic) in northern coastal areas. The purplish stems and fruits of *Rhamnus alaternus* are quite distinctive. *Rhamnus cathartica* is also cultivated in NZ, but is not known from the wild. *R. cathartica* has more ovate leaves than *R. alaternus*.

## HABITAT

Terrestrial. A plant of coastal and lowland habitats, grows in sites with low - low/moderate fertility. Invades scrub, forest margin, tall forest, low forest, shrubland, fernland, cliff and bare rock and river verge communities.

## GENUS

Rhamnus

## FAMILY

Rhamnaceae

## AUTHORITY

Rhamnus alaternus L.

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

May, June, July, August, September, October, November

## YEAR NATURALISED

1940

## ORIGIN

Mediterranean



Rhamnus alaternus. Photographer: Richard Hursthouse, Licence: CC BY.



Rhamnus alaternus. Photographer: Richard Hursthouse, Licence: CC BY.

## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental

## TOLERANCES

Highly tolerant of drought, shade and frost and tolerant to poor drainage. Physical damage, grazing and fire results in resprouting of the plant. After fire large leafy watershoots are produced from the base of the tree. Requires low to medium soil fertility.

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. Can spread vegetatively underground and by seed. Seed is produced at the rate of 3 seeds/fruit and 10 000 plus fruit per 8m tall individual (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seed is thought to remain viable in the seed bank for three years (Wotherspoon 1996). The seed is dispersed by birds.

## NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

**This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord.** The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

## ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

**This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC.** 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

## NVS CODE

RHAALA

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Timmins & MacKenzie 1995

Wotherspoon 1996

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/rhamnus-alaternus/>

## PDF DATE

25 May 2026