

# Technical Report



## Wetland Flora

No. 01-9 / September 2001

Gene Silberhorn

### Chinese Privet

*Ligustrum sinense* Lour.

#### Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Chinese privet is a tall shrub (up to 12 feet) with opposite, persistent to evergreen, simple, elliptic leaves (1 to 2 inches long) with smooth margins. Leaves are definitely evergreen when found farther south in its established range. The upper surface of the leaf is smooth (glabrous) and the opposite side is pubescent and whitish in color. Branches and petioles also are densely pubescent. Many small, white to cream-colored, tube-like flowers appear in terminal clusters in late spring/early summer and give off a rather unpleasant odor. Dark blue fruits (drupes) develop in late summer/early fall. *L. sinense* is a troublesome exotic species that often forms dense thickets.

#### Distribution

*Ligustrum sinense* is a native of China that has escaped and spread throughout much of the Southeastern States.

#### Habitat

This shrub likely escaped cultivation as an ornamental shrub in the past. Planted as a hedge or shrub as early as the mid-19th century and reported as an invasive species in the 1930's in the deep south. It is often found in dense colonies in both uplands and wetlands. Chinese privet is commonly found on the

margins of freshwater swamps. In Virginia and North Carolina it is particularly prolific along the Great Dismal Swamp Canal and appears to spread rapidly in cut over forested wetlands. Chinese privet has displaced native shrubs such as common elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis* (Wetland Flora, No. 95-3 / March 1995) and sweet pepperbush, *Clethra alnifolia* (Wetland Flora, No. 99-11 / November 1999). sloped wetlands and on the margins of depression wetlands in the inner coastal plain of Virginia.

#### Ecological Value/Benefits

Shrubs in general offer cover for song birds. There is some evidence that the drupe of this shrub has limited consumption value for birds. However, fleshy fruited shrubs, mainly blueberries, huckleberries, elderberries, and spicebush have proven value as wildlife food.

#### Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *Revision of The National List of Plant Species That Occur in Wetlands, 1997*, *Ligustrum sinense* is classified as a **facultative plant (FAC)** in the southeast. FAC plants are "equally likely to occur in wetlands or non-wetlands (estimated probability 34%-66%)."

*Ligustrum sinense* Lour.

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