

**Euonymus atropurpureus Jacq.**  
CELASTRACEAE

eastern wahoo

Synonyms: *Euonymus carolinensis* Marsh.  
*Euonymus latifolius* Marsh.

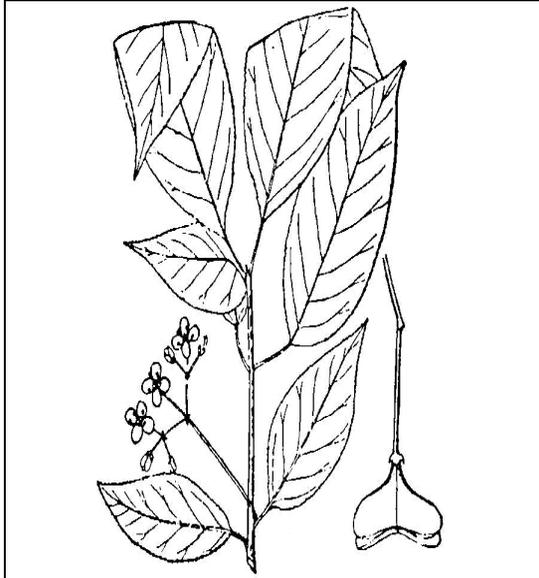


Illustration source: Britton and Brown 1913

**General Description.**—Eastern wahoo, also known as burning bush, is a shrub or small tree, up to 8 m high, with the main stem up to 10 cm in diameter at breast height. The stems are round, smooth, and green. The pith is white, round, continuous, and somewhat spongy. Its leaves are opposite (two per node) and spaced somewhat evenly along stem. The petioles can be up to 14 mm long. The leaf blades are elliptic to oblong elliptic, 8.5 to 11.3 by 3.2 to 5.5 cm papery, with cuneate to attenuate bases, crenulate margins, and acuminate apices. The blades have nine to 10 pairs of ascending lateral veins that disappear before reaching the margin. The flowers are formed on the current season's growth in small axillary clusters (cymes). Each peduncle is 2 to 3 cm long and can have several flowers, each one on a pedicel 5 to 7 mm long. The flowers are bisexual, 10 to 12 mm in diameter, with four greenish sepals and four brown-purple petals. There are four stamens, each 1.5 to 2.0 mm long. The four carpels are fused and a nectarous disk is present. The fruit of the eastern wahoo is a smooth reddish to pink four-lobed (sometimes one or more of the lobes abort) obovate capsule, up to 1.7 cm in diameter. The capsule opens along the lobes,

exposing the seeds that are covered by a bright red fleshy aril. The seeds (sans aril) are orange, glabrous, ellipsoid, 7.0 to 11.0 by 4.0 to 5.5 mm, glabrous. Some botanists spell the specific epithet "atropurpurea" instead of "atropurpureus" used here. This is because they disagree as to whether the genus name *Euonymus* L. should be treated as feminine ("atropurpurea") or masculine ("atropurpureus") (Paclt 1998). In classical Greek, the generic name was treated as feminine; however, Linnaeus treated the genus as masculine. The spelling "Euonymus" has formally been conserved over Linnaeus's originally spelling "Evonymus," which has also occasionally been used (Gilstra 1991).

**Range.**—Eastern wahoo is widely distributed throughout the Eastern United States (no records are known for Vermont) westward to the states of Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Texas (Ma 2001, Shetler and Orli 2000, USDA 2003). It also is known from Ontario (Gleason and Cronquist 1991, Scoggan 1978).

**Ecology.**—Eastern wahoo can be found in thickets, forests, often in lowlands or near creek bottoms, riversides and along the margins of marshes. It can also be found along mountain slopes. It usually occurs in elevations from sea level to 360 m.

**Reproduction.**—Hymenopterous insects, especially bees, seem to be the main pollinators, although wind may also be involved (Brizicky 1964). The fruits are dispersed by birds and small mammals (Brizicky 1964). Eastern wahoo blooms in late spring and early summer and the fruits ripen in autumn. The plant reproduces asexually through rhizomes, which allows it to form large colonies.

**Growth and Management.**—Eastern wahoo refers well-drained loamy soils. It is a moderately fast growing but short-lived shrub or tree. It can be planted in Hardiness Zones 3 to 7. Seed requires 8 to 16 weeks cold stratification prior to sowing. The plant can also be propagated with cuttings.

**Benefits.**—The common name “burning bush” comes from the plant’s bright red fall foliage. The red fruit and arillate seeds add to the “burning” effect. This makes the eastern wahoo an excellent shrub for horticultural use (Rehder 1940). The seeds and the vegetative organs of eastern wahoo are said to be poisonous (Brizicky 1964).

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