

Chinese /European /Border /California Privet



Ted Bodner



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Chinese privet shown in all images



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Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense* Lour. LISI

Oleaceae

European Privet, *L. vulgare* L. LIVU

Border Privet, *L. obtusifolium* Sieb. & Zucc. LIOB

California Privet, *L. ovalifolium* Hassk. LIOV

Plant. Thin, opposite-leaved, evergreen, thicket-forming shrubs to 30 feet (9 m) in height that are multiple stemmed and leaning to arching with long, leafy branches. Much used as border shrubs. Chinese privet is one of the most widely invasive plants in the South, while other three are less frequent. It is difficult to distinguish between Chinese and European, with probable blurring due to hybridization. **Caution: Fruit (berries) is poisonous.**

Stem. Opposite, long slender branching that increases upward with shorter twigs projecting outward at near right angles. Brownish gray turning gray green and hairy or not with light dots (lenticels). Leaf scars semicircular with 1 bundle scar. Bark light gray to brownish gray and slightly rough (not fissured).

Leaves. Thin and opposite in 2 rows at near right angle to stem. Chinese and European: ovate to elliptic with rounded tip (often minutely indented), 0.8 to 1.6 inches (2 to 4 cm) long and 0.4 to 1.2 inches (1 to 3 cm) wide, hairless beneath. Lustrous green above and pale green beneath with Chinese having a hairy midvein beneath. Border: elliptic-oblong, 1 to 2.2 inches (2.5 to 6 cm) long and 0.3 to 1 inch (0.8 to 2.5 cm) wide, hairless green above and hairy beneath. California: oval to elliptic with wedge-shaped base, 1.2 to 2.4 inches (3 to 6 cm) long and half as wide, lustrous green above and yellow green beneath and hairless. Margins entire. Petioles 0.04 to 0.2 inch (1 to 5 mm) long. Leaves usually persistent during winter, while California privet is deciduous northward.

Flowers. April to June. Abundant, terminal and upper axillary clusters on short branches forming panicles of white to cream flowers. Corolla 4-lobed, to 0.6 inch (1.8 cm) long, with stamens extending or within the corolla. Fragrance causing sinus irritation in many people, with California being the most unpleasant.

Fruit and seeds. July to March. Dense ovoid drupes hanging or projecting outward, 0.2 to 0.3 inch (6 to 8 mm) long and 0.16 inch (4 mm) wide, containing 1 to 4 seeds. Pale green in summer ripening to dark purple and appearing almost black in winter.

Ecology. Aggressive and troublesome invasives, often forming dense thickets, particularly in bottomland forests and along fencerows, thus gaining access to forests, fields, and right-of-ways. Shade tolerant. Colonize by root sprouts and spread widely by abundant bird- and animal-dispersed seeds.

Resemble Japanese privet (*L. japonicum* Thunb.) and glossy privet (*L. lucidum*), which have larger leaves and are further described in this book. **Also resemble** native swampprivet (*Forestiera* spp.), which have leaves on short twigs sparse axillary flowers, and few fruit.

History and use. Introduced from China and Europe in the early to mid-1800s. Traditional southern ornamentals. Variegated cultivars of Chinese privet are widely planted in the coastal South. Deer browse Chinese privet sprouts.

Distribution. Chinese and European privets are found throughout the region in dense infestations along highways and roadside margins, parks and preserves, bottomland and interior forests with most frequent infestations in MS, AL, GA, and SC. Border privet in KY, VA, NC, and TN. California privet in KY, VA, NC, AL, and FL, at present.

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