

COTONEASTER SPECIES

Cotoneaster franchetii

Cotoneaster pannosa

Cotoneaster lactea

Rose Family (Rosaceae)

DESCRIPTION

Cotoneasters (pronounced co-TONE-e-aster) are evergreen shrubs that grow in grasslands, shrublands, forests, and open areas, and can form dense thickets.

They are either sprawling or erect to about 10 feet tall. The branches criss-cross one another. The leaves are simple, elliptic-ovate, dark green to gray-green, and hairy beneath. They grow up to three-quarters of an inch long. The leaves of *C. lactea* are larger.

REPRODUCTION

Clusters of white to pink 5-petaled flowers bloom between June and September, followed by showy crops of orange or red berries September through February. Seeds are produced in great numbers and do not require fertilization. They drop near the parent plant but are readily eaten by many bird species, which increases the distance over which seeds can be dispersed. Seeds germinate during the rainy season. Cotoneaster can also spread vegetatively by root sprouting and by branches rooting at the nodes.

IMPACT

Cotoneaster is thought capable of invading intact ecosystems, where it competes with native vegetation for water, nutrient, and light resources. This is seen particularly in plant communities where the native toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) is found. The root system grows rapidly, making removal difficult. In addition, the dense shrubs frequently grow under trees and can facilitate the spread of fire by forming a fuel ladder.



KEY FACTORS

- u Produces many stump sprouts after cutting.
- u Root system is extensive and difficult to remove.
- u Abundant seed production and bird-dispersed fruits.
- u Seed longevity is not known, but may be several years.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

- u **Pull** seedlings a half-inch or less in diameter with a mini-Weed Wrench or by hand. Pulling is practical for small plants only, as cotoneaster develops multiple stems from a large root mass, making it difficult to grasp the base.
- u **Cut and treat.** Cut stumps close to the ground during the fall and winter. Practitioners using herbicides apply a 50 percent concentration of glyphosate to the stumps. Painting stumps with glyphosate is effective on large shrubs

but becomes more difficult on the smaller ones, as the many small stems can be hard to see. For smaller plants, it may be preferable to spray the herbicide.

- u **Cut and cover.** Remove all branches of mature shrubs with loppers or a pruning saw, then cut the trunk back to about 1 foot in height. If you cut much shorter, the plant may produce a significant number of sprouts from the root and trunk. Recommendations vary on when to cut, but research suggests cutting just after the shrub has produced fruit (when its energy reserves are at their lowest) but before fruit has dropped, thus minimizing the risk of mature berries germinating. Cover stump and surrounding ground (1–2 feet all the way around the stump) with landscape fabric for at least a year.

FOLLOW-UP

Return to the site at least once a year to check for resprouts and seedlings. If you use landscape fabric, check periodically that it hasn't been moved by animals or hikers. You can also remove the fabric twice a year to cut back any growth that has resulted despite the lack of sunlight. Make sure you reposition the fabric securely.

DISPOSAL

Individual plants can be piled on-site. For larger infestations you might want to chip the debris.

INTERESTING FACTS

Native to China, cotoneaster was introduced to the United States as an ornamental most likely during the mid- to late 1800s.

Notes