

## WEED PROFILE



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### Privet

*Ligustrum* spp. (Oleaceae)

#### What is it?

Large-leaf privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*) and small-leaf or Chinese privet (*L. sinense*) are major weeds of coastal New South Wales, and have also invaded parts of Victoria and Queensland. European privet (*L. vulgare*) is also known to be weedy in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. All three species are significant weeds in the USA and New Zealand.

Many of Tasmania's established and heritage gardens contain privet hedges, and several gardening programs have recently featured privet. Confusingly, privet species have been identified as both desirable ornamentals and environmental weeds. The problem is that some privets are weedy, but at least one species seems to be okay. Therefore, if you want to plant privet, or if you need to replace privets in your garden, it is important to make the right choice.

#### What does it look like?

Privets are deciduous or semi-evergreen shrubs, which hold their foliage into winter, but drop it before spring. The leaves are oppositely arranged on slender twigs and have 4-5 pairs of indistinct veins. The leaf blades are

A word of warning on privet species: all are toxic and can be fatal if eaten. Contact with the plant can also cause skin irritation. Horses and children are especially at risk. Privets are also thought to induce severe hayfever and asthma in susceptible people. A safe native alternative with similar features is cheesewood (*Pittosporum bicolor*) – but not other *Pittosporum* species, some of which have proved to be weedy in Tasmania.

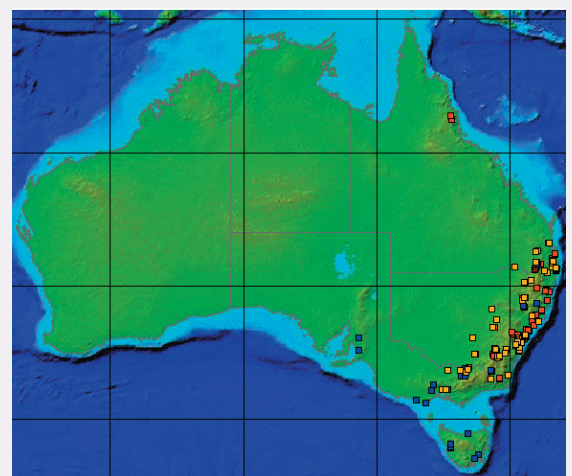


Fruits of *Ligustrum vulgare*

hairless, leathery and thick, with a glossy cuticle on the upper surface. The flowers, which appear in summer are small and white. The black, berry-like fruits each contain 1-4 seed. These ripen during March and April and often persist on the plants through winter. Most species readily grow from seed or from root and stump sprouts.

#### What is its weed potential?

Although Tasmania's climate would not appear to be ideal for privets, the fact that some species are native to the cool temperate regions of Asia and Eastern Europe suggests that they pose a genuine threat to our native ecosystems, especially wet forest, rainforest and river banks. Privet escapes cultivation by movement of seed, which is eaten and subsequently transported by wildlife, particularly birds. A safe alternative is the lower growing (up to 1.5m) box-leaf privet (*Ligustrum undulatum*). This species has small leaves, grows rapidly and does not appear to produce seed, thus virtually eliminating its weed potential.



Distribution of weedy *Ligustrum* species;  
■ *L. vulgare*, ■ *L. lucidum*, ■ *L. sinense*.  
(Source: Australia's Virtual Herbarium)