

Ellagood Autumn Olive for Wildlife Habitat Improvement in the Southeast

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'Ellagood' Autumn Olive is a proven plant for wildlife habitat improvement in the Southeast. This plant can provide wildlife food and cover for conservation buffers, for planting hedgerows to breakup large fields, screens, barriers and windbreaks.

Roland Wetherbee, a large landowner in Southwest Georgia, manages property for timber and wildlife use. He planted Ellagood on his properties in the late 1980s to enhance turkey habitat. He said, "turkeys actually break down the limbs to feed on the fruit". He went on to state, "fruit of Ellagood ripens later than the 'Cardinal' variety of autumn olive. The Ellagood usually ripens in September or October and normally lasts until sometime in December." Therefore, it offers a food source when many other plant fruits are no longer available.

Ellagood fruit is eaten by four species of upland game birds (including quail), two migratory game birds, 20 nongame birds and four mammals. Ellagood is also browsed by deer and barked by rabbits and meadow mice.

Ellagood is a spreading, upright shrub. It grows approximately 15 foot tall and may attain a width of 10-12 foot. The brown or yellowish-brown bark is smooth except on old stems, where it is somewhat scaly. It is a deep tap-rooted plant. The small leaves vary in shape from narrow to moderately wide, with wavy edges. Leaf color is pale olive-green with a silvery cast, especially on the underside. Flowers are small, trumpet-shaped and pale yellow in color. The astringent fruit vary from dull to bright red with small speckles. Abundant fruit production starts about four to five years after establishment of one-year-old plants.

Ellagood is an attractive ornamental and can be used for a variety of purposes. Leaf retention into early winter makes the plant extremely useful for screens, hedges, and windbreaks. However, the greatest potential of Ellagood is wildlife utilization.

Ellagood Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata* Thumb.) was released in 1986 by the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) Plant Materials Centers at Americus, Georgia, and Coffeeville, Mississippi, for wildlife habitat improvement.

The Ellagood variety is a vegetative increase from introduced material collected near Newton Square, Pennsylvania, in 1967 by W.W. Steiner.

Ellagood has the potential of becoming a pest by spreading to other areas. However, all known plantings were checked by plant materials specialists in 1985, and there was no documented spread vegetatively or by seed of Ellagood.

Mr. Wetherbee mows adjacent pastures and burns adjacent woodlands to limit possibility of Ellagood spread on his Southwest Georgia property.

Ellagood performs well on most upland soils and is tolerant of various soil textures. Ellagood is adapted to the Northeastern United States and as far south as Northern Florida and westward to Oklahoma and Texas.

In general, Ellagood is relatively free of insect and disease problems. However, as plants become older, dieback of branches can occur. In the most severe cases, which seem to be related to a high fertility and moisture level, dieback may affect as much as 25 percent of the plant.

Ellagood must be vegetatively propagated to retain its fruiting characteristics because fruiting habits of the seedlings are sparse and sporadic. Plants are started from hardwood cuttings then potted or bare rooted cuttings can be established.

Vegetatively propagated Ellagood plants are commercially available from several nurseries. For the most current information concerning availability of plants, contact either author:

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