

Russian Olive

(Elaeagnus angustifolia)

Russian Olive is a mid-sized tree, seldom growing taller than 30 feet. In some growing conditions it can be more like a large shrub than a tree. It is found throughout North America, with the exception of the southeastern US. It was introduced over 100 years ago primarily as a windbreak in the Midwest and western US, and has since escaped into the wild and in many states is considered an invasive plant. It is also favored as a landscape tree, which is how it is mainly encountered in the northeastern US (although recently Russian Olive has demonstrated invasive tendency in some northeastern states as well).

Russian Olive trees bloom from late April to early June. Some insect pollination occurs with Russian Olive flowers, but there is still a large amount of pollen dispersed into the air that is windborne and has been demonstrated to cause asthma, allergic rhinitis and allergic conjunctivitis. Russian Olive pollen is considered a mild to moderate allergen. There is some cross-reactivity data showing similar allergens to Olive tree pollen. Also, the mold *Verticillium* is a common pathogen on Russian Olive leaves, causing leaf wilt – and *Verticillium* is a mold recognized to cause allergy in susceptible individuals.

Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) is another species and a very close relative to Russian Olive. It is a highly invasive weed-tree, and occurs throughout the eastern US. While no data is available on allergy to this species, it should be expected to show extensive cross-reactivity to Russian Olive and could explain allergy symptoms in patients who show as skin test positive to Russian Olive in the southeastern US.

