

LOOK AGAIN !

A number of years ago the conservation department of an eastern State issued a list of plants which it had decided should be accorded statutory protection. Predictably, it included *Arethusa*, *Golden-seal* and *Green Dragon*, but to the surprise of many it also named *Celastrus orbiculatus*, or *Bittersweet*. The intent, as they were quick to explain, was to list *Celastrus scandens*, which is the native vine known as *Climbing* or *American Bittersweet*, or *Wax-wort*. Instead, they had inadvertently placed under the protection of law a rampant, destructive escape called *Oriental Bittersweet* by those anxious to avoid such confusion. To be fair, though, the error is one that is frequently made, and examples are easy to find in the literature.



C. ORBICULATUS

C. orbiculatus was imported in comparatively recent times and cultivated for its colorful fruits, which persist into the winter and are eminently useful in decorative floral arrangements. (Exploitation of the less resilient *C. scandens* for this purpose was responsible for its disappearance from many localities.) In both species the smooth, yellow, globular capsules develop in early fall from the pistillate flowers, which are greenish and quite inconspicuous. When they mature--and

you can induce this by bringing them into a warm house--they split open along three sutures and the segments become reflexed, revealing a shiny, brilliant red aril.

The arrangement of these fruits is diagnostic: In *C. orbiculatus* they occur in axillary cymes of no more than three, whereas in *C. scandens* they form a terminal panicle containing many more. Also, the leaves of the introduced species are relatively broader, becoming nearly round (hence the specific name).

Bittersweet vines climb by twining around small trees and holding on in a relentless death-grip. Many a hiker's walking stick is marked by deep spiralling grooves that attest to the struggle between a sapling and a Bittersweet.

Dick Smith