

# Bush Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.)



## DESCRIPTION:

The bush honeysuckles were introduced to North America from Eurasia as ornamental plants as early as 1752. Thomas Jefferson is known to have grown them on his Monticello estate and even noted in his journal that some had escaped into the woods. More recently they have been planted in misguided efforts to control erosion and improve habitat for wildlife. However, the berries have little nutritional value, composed mostly of water and sugar. Birds spread seeds widely, allowing the plants to become established in a variety of locations such as fence lines, backyards, woodlots and fields. Eurasian bush honeysuckles are allelopathic, they release chemicals into the environment that inhibit the germination and growth of other plant species and beneficial mycorrhizal fungi. They have the ability to grow rapidly, dominating both woodlands and fields leaving nothing but bare ground underneath.

There are several species, varieties and hybrids of bush honeysuckles in our area so this sheet will focus on them collectively. Honeysuckle can grow up to 15' in height and are easily identified by their distinctive arching stems structure. These are often the first shrubs to leaf-out in spring. The leaves are arranged opposite of each other on the stem, they are unlobed with smooth margins. In the fall these leaves turn a pale yellow and hang on the plants late into the season, making fall a good time to "seek and destroy" these plants. The bark is pale tan in color and somewhat flaky and fibrous. Small branches are hollow in cross-section. Flowers are not always present, but are ornate and aromatic, ranging from white, to yellow to pink, blooming in May and June. Bright red (occasionally orange) berries can be seen in late-summer and fall in clusters along the stems. There are also native species of honeysuckles in our area, but they are vines and thus are not easily confused with these invasive shrubs.



Leaves of Tartarian honeysuckle

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## CONTROL METHODS:

**Organic:** For larger plants, first cut the bush down, the best time of year is late spring when they have fully leaved-out (and may be flowering) as this is when the plant's energy reserves are lowest. Honeysuckle will resprout vigorously. Cut resprouts every 2-3 weeks, until the plant dies, which can take up to 2 years. Alternatively you could try the "buckthorn baggie" method, tying a thick black plastic around the stem or placing a weighted bucket over the stump that prevents light from reaching it. This method has a roughly 50% success rate. Honeysuckles have weak root systems, so individuals less than 3' tall can be hand pulled, especially in moist or loose soils. Larger individuals may be removed with the aid of a weed wrench. However, you should consider the effects of soil disturbance and erosion when uprooting plants.

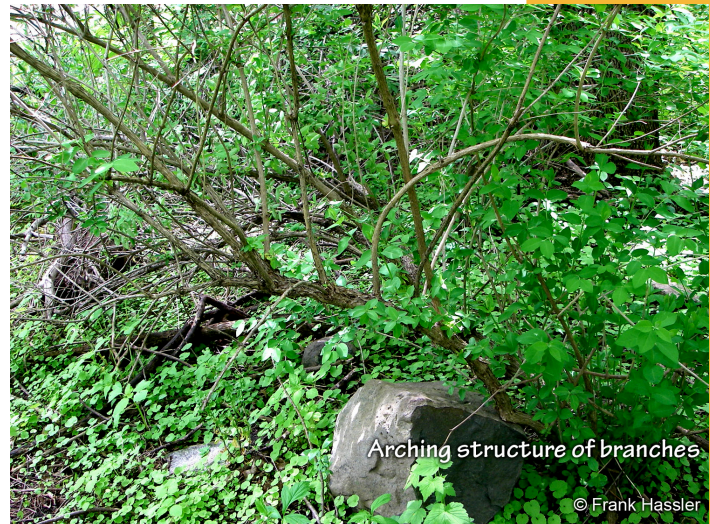
Regular prescribed fire is important in natural areas to prevent the establishment of this species and help control, but not eliminate individuals that are already established.

**Chemical:** The most effective way to control honeysuckle is to cut the shrub down as close to the ground as possible and apply a "cut-stump" treatment of concentrated glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) as soon as possible after cutting. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

## NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

In a landscape setting, many native shrubs can be used in place of honeysuckle including snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), nannyberry viburnum (*Viburnum lentago*) and maple leaved viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolius*). All of these species have attractive flowers and fruit which feed songbirds. If clearing large amounts of honeysuckle, such as in a woodlot, the area should be interseeded with a mix of native woodland wildflowers and grasses which can prevent the establishment of weeds, prevent erosion, provide resources for wildlife and improve the aesthetics of the site.

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Arching structure of branches

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Flowers

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