

bush honeysuckles

Lonicera spp.

Identification:

Caprifoliaceae (Honeysuckle Family)

Abundant Perennial shrub, deciduous **Height:** 4-18' **Width:** 5-20' **Leaf Arrangement:** opposite
Flower: Yellow, Pink, White **Blooms:** Late spring **Fruit:** Red berry **Fall Color:** Yellow

Several characteristics make bush honeysuckles distinctive and easy to identify, even in the winter: They have opposite leaf/branch arrangement, gray-tan bark with linear strips and an overall arching structure. The pith of the twigs is brown and hollow. These are among the first shrubs to produce leaves in spring. Leaves are simple, oval to oblong with a smooth margin. They hold their leaves later into fall than most native trees and shrubs, turning greenish-yellow, making them easy to seek and destroy during this time of year.

Bush honeysuckles bloom profusely at the leaf axils in late-spring, flower color ranges from magenta, to pink to white to creamy yellow. Berries ripen in late-summer, are red or orange in color, and about 1/4" in diameter. They may stay on the plant into late-fall or winter.

Native elderberries are somewhat similar in form to bush honeysuckles, but have smooth bark with small corky bumps and the pith of the twigs is white. There are several native honeysuckles, but they are distinctive from the invasive species. Native honeysuckles are vines or small shrubs such as dwarf bush honeysuckle. The shrubby species are less than 4' tall, stems emerging from the ground and rarely branching, and never more than 1/2" in diameter. The native honeysuckle shrubs will always grow in fine natural areas such as rocky cliffs and wetlands.



Weed Information Sheet:



RED HEAD Ecological Consulting

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**NR-40 Restricted
NR-40 Prohibited**

AKA:

Description & Impact:

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.

Control Methods:

Traditional: The most effective and efficient 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 “stump treatment” (as described on the product label) mix of glyphosate (Round-Up®, etc.) as soon as possible after cutting.

Critical Period Cutting: This technique, first developed for controlling buckthorn without the use of herbicide, has potential to be adapted for use with honeysuckle. The “critical period” part of this technique is the time period in late spring when they have just fully leaved-out (and may be flowering), as this is when the plant’s energy reserves are lowest. Cut the bush down to just below the height of the lowest leaves. Higher is better, however, due to honeysuckles more branching, sprawling growth form, you may have to cut some branches fairly low and overall unevenly. Be sure to remove *all* green foliage. The honeysuckle will likely resprout quickly after this initial cutting. Remove newly sprouting stems and leaves once the leaves unfurl completely, this may be feasible to do by hand due to the weak nature of buckthorn wood. By cutting the stems high, you can also use a saw or pruners to cut the main branches just below the lowest new sprouts. Repeat until the honeysuckle ceases trying to re-sprout at which point you can cut the stump to the ground.

Hand Pulling: 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.

Revegetation Recommendations: In a landscape setting, many native shrubs can be used in place of honeysuckle including common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), 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.

Citations: https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mnap/features/invasive_plants/lonicera.htm

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