

# DIRTY DOZEN DOSSIER: EXOTIC BUSH HONEYSUCKLES



**Exotic Bush Honeysuckles** (*Lonicera* spp) often bring back childhood memories of drinking "honey" from fragrant, tubular shaped flowers that bloom in early spring to summer depending upon the species. This grouping includes several species — Morrow's, Amur, Tartarian, January Jasmine, and Bell's Bush. These plants originated from Eurasia and are, like Privet, shade tolerant and rapidly invade disturbed areas, forest edges, roadsides, and even bogs, fens, lakeshores and sand plains. Because of this ability to rapidly establish in a diverse range of growing conditions, bush honeysuckles were often used for erosion control and wildlife cover. Bush honeysuckles are also often planted as ornamentals and can be found in many modern planned landscapes. Unfortunately, bush honeysuckle spreads rapidly beyond its planted range, often courtesy of birds that eat its berries. Once established, Bush honeysuckle outcompetes native shrubs, depletes soil moisture and nutrients and otherwise establishes monoculture stands. It is thought that these exotic honeysuckles release chemicals toxic to other plant species that prevents other plants from growing in the same area. While its flowers are fragrant to pollinators, it draws away these pollinators from native species and reduces seed set. Birds are attracted to its fruit, but do not receive the high fat, nutrient rich support that native fruit provide to migrating birds.

Bush honeysuckles are upright, spreading shrubs that are generally deciduous, losing their leaves in winter revealing abundant clusters of orange to red fruit. The leaves are usually egg-shaped, but can be pointed at the end (Amur), arranged along the branches in opposite pairs. Unlike native honeysuckle that only flowers at the end of the branch, exotic bush honeysuckles bloom along the leaf axils, usually in fragrant, one-inch tubular forms that range from white to pale pink or even crimson in the case of Tartarian honeysuckle. Older stems are often hollow, unlike native bush honeysuckles that have solid stems. Bush honeysuckles are prolific berry producers, with yellow, orange or red berries that contain many seeds.



## Controlling

**Mechanical.** Hand removal of seedlings or small plants may be useful for light infestations, but care should be taken not to disturb the soil any more than necessary. In shaded forest habitats, where exotic bush honeysuckles tend to be less resilient, repeated clippings to ground level, during the growing season, may result in high mortality. Clipping must be repeated at least once yearly because bush honeysuckles that are cut once and left to grow will often form stands that are more dense and productive than they were prior to cutting.

**Chemical.** Seedlings of exotic bush honeysuckles can also be controlled by application of a systemic herbicide, like glyphosate (e.g., Roundup®), at a 1 percent solution, sprayed onto the foliage or applied by sponge. Well established stands of exotic bush honeysuckles are probably best managed by cutting the stems to ground level and painting or spraying the stumps with a slightly higher rate of glyphosate (2-3%).

Prescribed burning has shown some promise for exotic bush honeysuckles growing in open habitats. In all instances, control should be initiated prior to the seed dispersal period (late summer to early autumn) to minimize reinvasion of treated habitats.

## Native Plant Alternatives

There is a native bush honeysuckle, **Southern Bush Honeysuckle** (*Diervilla sessifolia*), that provides good hedging in sun and part shade. Other native shrubs that provide flowers, fruit, and many seasons of color include **Viburnum** (Mapleleaf, Possumhaw, Arrowwood, Rusty Blackhaw), **Sweetshrub**, **Elderberry**, **Coralberry**, **Chokeberry** and **Spicebush**.



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