

DIRTY DOZEN DOSSIER:

JAPANESE HONEYSUCKLE



Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) might have been intentionally planted along your garden walls and fences because it is a vigorous grower with sweet smelling flowers. Regardless of whether you planted this vine, you might see it sneaking along the ground somewhere in your yard, creating a dense mat of ropey vines and twining around trees and shrubs. Japanese honeysuckle can girdle small saplings and it can form dense mats in the canopies of trees, shading everything below. Given a full opportunity to grow and spread, Japanese honeysuckle can destroy native habitat more effectively than Kudzu.

Japanese honeysuckle is an evergreen to semi-evergreen vine that can be found either trailing or climbing to over 80 feet in length. It flowers from April to July with showy, fragrant, tubular, whitish-pink to yellow flowers growing between the pairs of oval leaves. Fruits develop in the fall and are small, shiny black berries. Japanese honeysuckle invades a variety of habitats including forest floors, canopies, roadsides, wetlands, and disturbed areas. Berry-eating birds account for some of this pest plant's spread. While some people may think exotic plants like Honeysuckle support wildlife, these plants are not a natural food source and rarely supply the correct nutrition for local wildlife.

A native of eastern Asia, it was first introduced into North America in 1806 in Long Island, NY. Japanese honeysuckle was planted widely throughout the United States as an ornamental, for erosion control, and for wildlife habitat. Now it is considered a major pest plant in this area and a cause of habitat disruption.

Controlling

Mechanical. For small patches, repeated pulling of entire vines and root systems may be effective. Hand pull seedlings and young plants when the soil is moist, holding low on the stem to remove the whole plant along with its roots. Monitor frequently and remove any new plants. Cut and remove twining vines to prevent them from girdling and killing shrubs and other plants. An effective method for removal of patches of honeysuckle covering the ground is to lift up and hold a portion of the vine mass with a rake and have a chain saw operator cut the stems low to the ground. Mowing large patches of honeysuckle may be useful if repeated regularly but is most effective when combined with herbicide application (see below). Mow at twice a year, first in mid-July and again in mid-September.

Chemical. Japanese honeysuckle leaves continue to photosynthesize long after most other plants have lost their leaves. This allows for application of herbicides when many native species are dormant. However, for effective control with herbicides, healthy green leaves must be present at application time and temperatures must be sufficient for plant activity. Several systemic herbicides (e.g., glyphosate and triclopyr) move through the plant to the roots when applied to the leaves or stems and have been used effectively on Japanese honeysuckle. Following label guidelines, apply a 2.5% rate of glyphosate (e.g., Rodeo® for wetlands; Roundup® for uplands) mixed with water and an appropriate surfactant, to foliage from spring through fall. Alternatively, apply a 2% concentration of triclopyr (e.g., Garlon 3A) plus water to foliage, thoroughly wetting the leaves but not to the point of drip-off. A coarse, low-pressure spray should be used. Repeat applications may be needed. Treatment in the fall, when many non-target plants are going dormant, is best. Also, a 25% glyphosate or triclopyr solution mixed with water can be applied to cut stem surfaces any time of year as long as the ground is not frozen.

Native Plant Alternatives

Vines that make good substitutes for Japanese honeysuckle include **Carolina jessamine**, **Trumpet honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*), **Trumpet creeper**, **Crossvine**, **native wisteria** and **Passionflower vine**.



For more information about invasive exotic pest plants, native plants of the Southeast and to join the Tennessee Valley Wild Ones, go to www.chattanooganatives.blogspot.com