

Target Invasive Species

Japanese honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica*



Description

Lonicera japonica grows as a perennial trailing or climbing woody vine. Its leaves are 4- 8 cm long, opposite, ovate and entire. The leaves are semi-evergreen, falling off in midwinter. Leaves are all separate, which distinguishes them from the indigenous vine honeysuckles, which have leaves joined at the base. Young stems are reddish-brown to light

brown, and older stems are hollow with a brownish bark that peels in long strips. Flowers are produced from spring through summer. The tubular flowers are typically white (fading to yellow) with long curved stamens projecting from the corolla. *Lonicera japonica* var. *chinensis* has red flowers and is rarely found in New Jersey. Flowers are very fragrant and are borne in pairs on axillary peduncles. Black globose berries, 5-6 mm in diameter, mature in the late summer and early fall. The fruits are bird dispersed. Japanese honeysuckle creates dense thickets by stem branching, rooting at the nodes, and vegetative spread from rhizomes.

Habitat

Japanese honeysuckle frequently establishes in disturbed habitats, including successional fields, roadsides, forest edges and gaps, and fencerows. In New Jersey, the species grows in similarly disturbed or successional habitats but also occurs in limestone woods, trap rock glades, flood plain forests, sand dunes, beaches, salt marsh borders, Coastal Plain marl ravines, borders and thickets of Coastal Plain ponds, oak and pine woodlands, and shale bluffs. It grows most vigorously in full sun and on rich soil, but it is shade and drought tolerant.





Threats

Japanese honeysuckle spreads rapidly and is a strong competitor, for both above and below-ground resources. Below-ground root competition can decrease the growth of native trees and vines. Above ground it can change forest structure by engulfing small trees and shrubs, causing them to collapse under the weight of the vines. On the ground it can form a cover so dense that native trees, shrubs, and herbs are unable to re-establish. In New Jersey, it has been reported to occupy habitats of rare plants and is attributed as a cause of their decline. Honeysuckle also leafs out very early in spring, which could inhibit flowering by spring ephemerals.

Control

Removing only above-ground vegetation, either by cutting or mowing, is ineffective because of resprouting. Hand-pulling can be effective if most of the roots and runners can be removed, but is probably only practical for small patches of seedlings and young plants. All parts of the plant should be removed from the site to prevent reestablishment. Some herbicides are effective, and they can be applied when native plants are dormant due to the semi-evergreen nature of Japanese honeysuckle. The best time to apply herbicides is after the first killing frost, but before the first hard frost. A combination of burning and herbicide treatment has also proved effective. Herbicides should be used in accordance with New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection guidelines, give web reference here if possible.

Suggested Alternative Plants

Vines that make good substitutes for Japanese honeysuckle include false jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), native wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*), jackman clematis (*Clematis jackmanii*), and rock clematis (*Clematis columbiana*). For a list of additional native shrubs, visit www.bbg.org/nativealternatives.

Sources: An Overview of Nonindigenous Plant Species in New Jersey, New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection Natural and Historic Resources Group Parks and Forestry. www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/natural/invasivereport.pdf.

Weeds Gone Wild: Alien Plant Invaders of Natural Areas, Plant Conservation Alliance's Plant Working Group. www.nps.gov/plants/alien/.

Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants, C. Colston Burrell, Brooklyn Botanic Garden All-Region Guides, 2006.

Photos courtesy of Elaine Haug, Smithsonian Institution, Department of Systemic Biology-Botany, VA, Manassas (flowers) on <http://plants.usda.gov/>, and James R. Allison, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (plant) and Chuck Barger, University of Georgia (fruit) on <http://www.invasive.org>.

Drawing from USDA NRCS. *Wetland flora: Field office illustrated guide to plant species*. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, <http://plants.usda.gov>.