

Bush Honeysuckles

Amur (*Lonicera maackii*) and Bella (*Lonicera X bella*)

Background, Life History

Unlike Missouri's twining native honeysuckle vines, Amur and bella honeysuckle are erect shrubby, bush honeysuckles native to eastern Asia. They were introduced in the mid to late 1800s for landscape ornamentals, wildlife cover and erosion control. Bush honeysuckles are currently found statewide.

Amur honeysuckle is larger, growing to be 20 feet tall with leaves 2 to 3 inches long, while bella honeysuckle grows to be only 6 to 15 feet tall with 1- to 2.5-inch leaves. The leaves on both plants are opposite, narrowly elliptical and have a green surface with a pale green, slightly fuzzy underside. The twigs of all the bush honeysuckles are thornless and hollow.

In the spring, fragrant paired tubular 1-inch long flowers with narrow petals appear. These flowers are white or pink but become yellowish as they age. The fruit matures in September to October. Typically, red berries are produced in pairs near the origin of the leaves. Each berry contains two to six seeds. Bush honeysuckle seeds are primarily distributed by birds and small mammals. Seeds germinate in shade of a forest canopy.

Bush honeysuckles can tolerate wet soils for brief periods. They thrive in shaded forest understory. Thriving on neglect, they are also found along fencerows, thickets, woodlands, roadsides, pastures, old fields and unattended areas. Additionally, bella honeysuckle is tolerant of moisture so it may be found in bogs, fens, lakeshores and riparian areas.

Impacts

Bush honeysuckle leaves appear early in the spring and remain late into fall, giving them a competitive advantage over native plants. They form a thick understory that limits sunlight to native plants inhibiting seedling establishment and forest regeneration. They also compete for soil moisture, nutrients, and may produce a chemical that inhibits native plant growth. All species of honeysuckle also spread from the roots, resulting in the ability to further dominate an area. Bush honeysuckles compete with native plants for pollinators, resulting in fewer seeds set on native species.



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Bush honeysuckles leaf out early in the spring and block sunlight from native plants. Fragrant white flowers become yellowish as they age.

The berries, which form in pairs, do not provide the nutritional needs of migrating birds.

Unlike native shrubs, the fruits of exotic bush honeysuckles are carbohydrate-rich and do not provide migrating birds with the high-fat content needed for long flights.

Control

There are several different methods of control for the bush honeysuckles.

- When the plant is small and the soil is moist, **hand pulling** is an option if the entire plant can be removed. This method should not be used in highly sensitive areas because it disturbs the soil and aids in the spread of other invasive species.
- The **cut-stump method** involves cutting the bush off at the stump and applying a 20 percent glyphosate solution with a sprayer or brush to thoroughly cover the freshly cut area.
- **Foliar spray** the leaves with a 2 percent solution of glyphosate and water plus a non-ionic surfactant, which improves the chemical's ability to adhere to the plant. This method should be used in early spring or late fall before or after the leaves of native plants are present.
- The **basal-bark method** consists of spraying a mixture of 25 percent triclopyr and 75 percent horticultural oil to the bush's stems to a height of 12 to 15 inches from the ground. Thorough wetting is necessary for good control.

- **Fire** assists in the control of honeysuckles if there is enough fuel and the area can be burned safely. Burn every spring or every other spring for several years to control resprouting.

Identifying Bush Honeysuckles

- 6 to 20 feet tall, depending on species
- opposite leaves, narrowly elliptical with green surface and pale green, slightly fuzzy underside
- thornless and hollow twigs
- 1-inch long fragrant paired tubular flowers with narrow petals; white flowers that later become yellowish
- pair of red berries near origin of leaves in fall

Alternative Native Plants

Deciduous holly, crabapple, plums, shrub dogwoods

For Additional Information

moinvasives.org/project/invasive-bush-honeysuckles-licnicera
invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3042
missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening/gardening-in-st-louis/invasives/bush-honeysuckle
naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/encyclopedia/honeysuckle-invasive-species-profile

mdc.mo.gov

For more information or to report a population, contact your local Missouri Department of Conservation office, e-mail WildlifeDivision@mdc.mo.gov, or write:

Bush Honeysuckles
Missouri Department of Conservation
Invasive Species Coordinator
PO Box 180
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180

