

INVASIVE EXOTICS

Japanese Honeysuckle

Lonicera japonica

Honeysuckle Family (Caprifoliaceae)



What does it look like? Japanese honeysuckle, native to Eastern Asia, is a trailing or twining woody vine. Young stems are often pubescent; older stems are hollow with brownish exfoliating bark. The simple, opposite leaves are oval to oblong in shape and may persist on the vine year-round, making honeysuckle a semi-evergreen vine. The white to pale yellow flowers are extremely fragrant and produced throughout the summer. The fruit is a many-seeded, black, pulpy berry that matures in early autumn.

What habitats are threatened by this plant? Japanese honeysuckle occurs primarily in disturbed habitats such as roadsides, trails, old fields and forest edges. It often invades native plant communities after natural or human-induced disturbance such as floods, logging, road construction, etc. Where light levels are optimal, such as forest edges, gaps in the forest canopy, or under sparse, open forest, newly established honeysuckle vines grow and spread rapidly. Vines whose growth has been suppressed in dense shade, however, are capable of rapid growth and spread when light levels increase due to disturbance.

How does this plant spread? Japanese honeysuckle spreads primarily by birds and other wildlife that feed on the pulpy fruit in early autumn. The vines spread vertically and horizontally by climbing up tree trunks and/or by trailing over the forest floor. Trailing vines produce stolons, which root when they contact the soil. Once established, a single vine can grow to a length of 30 ft. or more.

Where is this plant found in the United States? Japanese honeysuckle was introduced to cultivation in 1862 in Long Island, N.Y. It now is widely naturalized in the eastern and central U.S., most abundantly on the piedmont and coastal plain forests. Honeysuckle was, and in some areas still is, planted as an ornamental ground cover, for erosion control and for wildlife food and habitat.

How can this plant be controlled? Prevention is the first line of defense: Plant native honeysuckle as a substitute. Small populations of Japanese honeysuckle can be controlled by careful hand-pulling, grubbing out with a hoe or shovel and removal of trailing vines. Over large areas, twice yearly mowing can slow vegetative spread; but stem density may increase due to vigorous re-sprouting. Honeysuckle can be treated with a glyphosate herbicide such as Roundup, best applied to the semi-evergreen leaves in late autumn when other vegetation is dormant but honeysuckle still is physiologically active. Reapplication may be necessary to treat plants missed during the initial application. Follow label directions when applying any herbicide.

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