

BUSH HONEYSUCKLE:

A sweet-sounding name but a nasty plant

BUSH HONEYSUCKLE.

The name evokes thoughts of fragrant scents wafting through the warm summer air. But in fact, exotic bush honeysuckle, unlike the honeysuckle vines native to Missouri, is a cruel invader of forests and woodlands throughout much of the Midwest, including Innsbrook.

The Kansas City chapter of the Sierra Club posts this warning on its website:

"In time, a bush honeysuckle infestation can totally dominate the forest interior. Spring wildflowers are unable to get sunlight through the dense honeysuckle canopy and disappear. Oaks, some of our dominant forest trees, are probably the most beneficial wildlife tree due to their production of acorns. They are beautiful and yield valuable commercial timber. They also need sunlight to germinate. In time, forests with a severe bush honeysuckle infestation will have little to no oak reproduction. Bush honeysuckle-infested forests cannot support as many different kinds of plants or animals as non-infested ones. Any animal living in the forest understory that is not able to exploit the honeysuckle for food or shelter won't be able to survive there. While certain birds relish bush honeysuckle berries in fall, aggressive honeysuckle reduces the plant diversity of a forest, making it less attractive to nesting forest birds."



In late November, bush honeysuckle is clearly visible as it spreads through Innsbrook woodlands.

AN ALIEN INVADER

Bush honeysuckle is native to Asia. It was introduced to North America in the late 1890s as an ornamental. It is now naturalized in 24 states. In urban and suburban settings, it has become the dominant plant. Much of St. Louis County's remaining woodlands are now overrun with bush honeysuckle.

The invasive plant easily crowds out native plants. It is the first plant to leaf out in the spring, so it gets a head start on native plants and its canopy shades out the sunlight. The bush honeysuckle remains green and leafy through late November, continuing to grow and strengthen after natives have gone to bed for the winter. The plants can reach up to 20 feet in height. Furthermore, the bush honeysuckle is a prolific producer of berries that are attractive to some bird species. The birds spread the seeds through their droppings, so an isolated infestation can leapfrog through an area quickly.



White to yellow flowers appear in May and June.

IDENTIFYING BUSH HONEYSUCKLE

As the name implies, the invasive honeysuckle is a bush. The oblong leaves occur in two opposite rows. Stems are tan with a braided strand appearance. Often the older branches are hollow. In May and June, the bushes produce an attractive white flower, which fades to yellow as it ages. In late summer, bright red berries form in pairs at the axils of the leaves.



Bright red berries, which are dispersed by birds, appear in late summer.

CONTROL MEASURES

Bush honeysuckles have shallow root systems, so seedlings can be pulled by hand. It is important, however, to remove the entire root to prevent resprouting. Most vegetation managers, including the Missouri Department of Conservation, report that treatment with herbicides is necessary. Herbicides such as glyphosate (Roundup) and triclopyr (Garlon) have been used successfully as foliar sprays or cut stump applications. Foliar sprays should be applied late in the growing season. For large plants, it is most effective to cut the stalk in late summer through the dormant season and paint the stump with herbicide. To prevent wider infestation, it is important to take control measures before berries ripen and become attractive to birds.

TAKE ACTION

During the past two years, hundreds of honeysuckle bushes have been removed from Innsbrook, but many more have been identified. Certainly many others have yet to be identified. If you have bush honeysuckle on your property, please remove it or call to have volunteers remove it for you. Call Innsbrook's Horticulturist Keith Thompson at (636) 745-3000, Ext. 177.

Bush honeysuckle is not yet out of control at Innsbrook. Let's work together to preserve our native environment.