NEW JERSEY NON-NATIVE PLANTS

Japanese honeysuckle

(*Lonicera japonica*)

Description

Lonicera japonica grows as a perennial trailing or climbing woody vine. Japanese honeysuckle frequently establishes in disturbed habitats, including successional fields, roadsides, forest edges and gaps, and fencerows. 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. It grows most vigorously in full sun and on rich soil, but it is shade and drought tolerant.

Why is Japanese honeysuckle bad for New Jersey?

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.

Japanese honeysuckle

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Control:

How can you get rid of Japanese honeysuckle?

Although many efforts to control Japanese honeysuckle infestations have included mowing, grazing, or prescribed burning and herbicides, a combination of prescribed burns and herbicide spraying have proven to be the most effective treatment. However, for small infestations, the following methods are available:

Mechanical - 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 re-establishment.

Chemical - Some herbicides are effective, and they can be applied when native plants are dormant. The best time to apply herbicides is after the first killing frost, but before the first hard frost. Glyphosate herbicide (tradename Roundup) is the recommended treatment for this honeysuckle. The herbicide should be applied after surrounding vegetation has become dormant in autumn and before a hard freeze (25^0F). Retreatment may be necessary for plants that are missed because of dense growth. Although glyphosate is effective when used during the growing season, use at this time is not recommended because of the potential harm to nontarget plants. Glyphosate is non-selective, so care should be taken to avoid contacting nontarget species. Crossbow, a formulation of triclopyr and 2,4-D, is also a very effective herbicide that controls Japanese honeysuckle.

Burning - In fire-adapted communities, spring prescribed burns greatly reduced Japanese honeysuckle coverage and crown volume. Repeated fires reduced honeysuckle by as much as 50% over a single burn. A previously burned population of honeysuckle will recover after several years if fire is excluded during this time. By reducing honeysuckle coverage with fire, refined herbicide treatments may be applied, if considered necessary, using less chemical.