

FIELD GUIDE

BUSH HONEYSUCKLE.

How to spot it, what it gets confused with, and what actually works to get rid of it around Greater Cincinnati.

WHY IT MATTERS

IT TAKES OVER AND PUSHES EVERYTHING ELSE OUT.

Bush honeysuckle is a group of invasive shrubs (Amur, Morrow's, Tatarian and their hybrids) brought over as ornamentals. They grow 6 to 20 feet tall with long arching branches, and they handle sun or shade, so they fill woodland edges, fence rows, fields and the understory of open woods.

Left alone it forms thickets so dense nothing else grows underneath. It spreads two ways: birds eat the berries and drop seeds everywhere, and cut stems sprout right back from the roots.



A woodland understory filled in with bush honeysuckle.
Photo: Yann Kemper / iNaturalist (CC0)

- ✕ Shades out wildflowers and young native trees
- ✕ Turns usable yard and woods into a wall
- ✕ Berries are low in the fat migrating birds need
- ✕ Cutting it down alone makes it sprout thicker

HOLLOW BROWN STEM

Snap an older stem. Hollow and brown inside means honeysuckle.

FIRST GREEN, LAST GREEN

Leaves out first in spring and holds leaves late into fall.

RED BERRIES IN PAIRS

Shiny red berries sitting in pairs along the stems.

HOW TO IDENTIFY IT

SIX WAYS TO TELL IT IS HONEYSUCKLE.

Check two or three of these together. The hollow stem is the surest single test.



INVASIVE: HOLLOW

NATIVE: SOLID

HOLLOW, BROWN CENTER

Snap or cut an older stem. Invasive bush honeysuckle is hollow with a brown center. Native honeysuckles have a solid stem. This is the most reliable test.

Illustration: Brushworks

**OPPOSITE LEAVES, SMOOTH EDGES**

Leaves grow in pairs across from each other, 1 to 3½ inches long, with smooth (untoothed) edges. Amur honeysuckle leaves end in a long, sharp point.

Photo: Howard Williams / iNaturalist (CC BY-SA)

**SHAGGY, STRIPED BARK**

Older stems are grayish-brown with long ridges and grooves that look striped or shredded. Plants grow as clumps of many stems.

Photo: Sandy Wolkenberg / iNaturalist (CC BY)

**PAIRED TUBULAR FLOWERS**

In spring it blooms with small fragrant flowers in pairs along the stem. Amur and Morrow's open white and turn yellow. Tatarian is pink to red.

Photo: florawhite / iNaturalist (CC BY)

**SHINY RED BERRIES**

Small round berries about ¼ inch across, usually red, sometimes orange. They show up mid-summer and often hang on into winter.

Photo: Tom Erler / iNaturalist (CC0)

**LEAF OUT FIRST**

It is one of the first shrubs to leaf out in spring and one of the last to drop its leaves in fall. When the woods are bare and one shrub is green, look closer.

Photo: florawhite / iNaturalist (CC BY)

WHEN TO LOOK

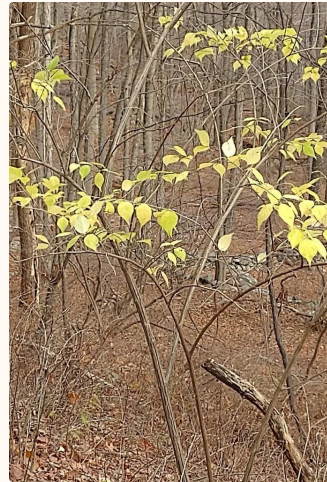
SPRING AND FALL MAKE IT EASY.



EARLY SPRING

It leafs out weeks before most native trees and shrubs. A green layer under bare trees is usually honeysuckle.

Photo: florawhite / iNaturalist (CC BY)



LATE FALL

It holds green or yellow leaves well after most natives have dropped theirs. Mid-October through November is a great time to walk your property and flag it.

Photo: peakaytea / iNaturalist (CC0)

DO NOT CONFUSE IT WITH

LOOK-ALIKES WORTH KNOWING.



Japanese honeysuckle is a vine.

Photo: Sam Kieschnick / iNaturalist (CC BY)

JAPANESE HONEYSUCKLE (VINE)

Also invasive, but it is a twining vine that climbs fences and trees, not a shrub. Fragrant white-to-yellow flowers. Different plant, different control.

NATIVE BUSH HONEYSUCKLE

A low native shrub with toothed leaf edges and a solid stem. Invasive honeysuckle has smooth edges and a hollow stem.

AMERICAN FLY HONEYSUCKLE

A native shrub with a solid stem. Keep it.

SNOWBERRY

Hollow stem like honeysuckle, but small pink bell-shaped flowers and white berries.

DOGWOODS AND VIBURNUMS

Opposite leaves like honeysuckle, but the leaves look different and the stems are solid.

Not sure? Send us a photo of a snapped stem and a leaf. We are happy to take a look. Text (513) 790-4150.

HOW TO GET RID OF IT

MATCH THE METHOD TO THE MESS.

There is no one-and-done fix. The plant has to be knocked out above ground and the roots have to be dealt with, or it comes back.

01 PULL SMALL PLANTS

ANY TIME, BEST AFTER RAIN

Seedlings and small shrubs can be pulled or dug when the ground is soft. Get every bit of root or it sprouts back.

02 CLEAR THE BIG STUFF

YEAR-ROUND; WINTER IS GREAT

For thickets, forestry mulching grinds it all down in place, usually in a day, with no burn piles or hauling. Frozen or dry ground means less disturbance. The roots are still alive, so plan the follow-up.

03 CUT AND PAINT THE STUMP

LATE SUMMER THROUGH WINTER

For bad spots, cut the stem close to the ground and paint Tordon RTU or a glyphosate product on the fresh cut right away. It soaks down and kills the root. Avoid spring, when sap is running.

Careful: Keep Tordon away from the roots of trees and shrubs you want to keep, and read the whole label first.

04 SPRAY THE REGROWTH

ONCE LEAVES ARE OUT; MID TO LATE OCTOBER IS IDEAL

Spray needs leaves to land on. Since honeysuckle stays green after natives go dormant, a mid to late October spray hits it with less risk to everything else.

05 FOLLOW UP FOR A YEAR

NEXT GROWING SEASON

Watch treated areas for at least a year and hit anything that sprouts back. Or let our TruGreen program handle it.

Always read and follow the product label, and keep spray off plants you want to keep. Mix rates and timing come from the label, not from us.

SEASON BY SEASON

A HONEYSUCKLE CALENDAR.

Check them off as you go.

SPRING

- ☐ Spot it: first green in the woods
- ☐ Pull seedlings after rain
- ☐ Skip cut-stump treatments while sap runs

EARLY SUMMER

- ☐ Cutting and mowing hit hardest now, when the plant's reserves are lowest
- ☐ Spray regrowth that has leafed out

LATE SUMMER TO FALL

- ☐ Cut-stump treatments work well
- ☐ Mid to late October: spray while natives are dormant
- ☐ Walk it and flag the green shrubs

WINTER

- ☐ Great time to clear: frozen or dry ground
- ☐ Berries make it easy to spot
- ☐ Book the clearing before spring leaf-out

TOO MUCH TO PULL? THAT IS WHAT WE DO.

We clear honeysuckle thickets, hillsides and fence rows across Greater Cincinnati, then help you keep it from coming back. Call or text (513) 790-4150 for a free quote.



GET A QUOTE



NEED IT CLEARED?

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CALL OR TEXT

(513) 790-4150

EMAIL

team@brushworksco.com

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GET A QUOTE

Sources: Ohio State University Extension, fact sheet F-68: Controlling non-native invasive plants in Ohio forests: bush honeysuckle; Penn State Extension: Shrub honeysuckle, accurate identification.

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