

Invasive Species Profile: Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)

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Native Range: East Asia

U.S. Introduction: 1806 as an ornamental

Life Cycle: perennial vine

Means of Spreading: rapid vine growth; berries, eaten by birds which pass the seeds

Commercially Available: yes, especially under the cultivars, 'Purpurea' and 'Hall's Prolific,' though few nurseries still stock it while other states ban it

Control Method: hand-pull seedlings and young plants. Mature vines may require mechanical tools, such as a Weed Wrench.

Good Alternative Species: coral or trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)

Comments:

One of the smells of summer is that of Japanese honeysuckle blossoms. Encountering its fragrance is common because this plant is a highly invasive weed. Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) was introduced into the U.S. in 1806, specifically to Long Island, New York. This ornamental vine was believed to help stabilize soil against erosion while feeding wildlife. Birds eat the small, dark berries that ripen in winter and deer forage on the foliage. In addition to pollinators sipping honeysuckles, people enjoy picking the flowers and sucking the sweet nectar droplet from the blossom's base. For the first few decades, this vine appeared to be a fine garden supplement—at least nobody was complaining about it yet. In 1862, George Hall imported an especially hardy and bountiful variety to the Parsons & Co. nursery (Flushing, NY). At the time, it was called the 'Halliana' cultivar, appeared in the 1887 catalog as "Lonicera Halleana" (different spelling), and has since been renamed 'Hall's Prolific.' Like most invasive plants, several decades of lag time transpired between this cultivar's introduction and achieving the "invasive" status. Between its aggressive spread and commercial distribution, 'Halliana' escaped cultivation, initially described as "wildflowers" or "naturalized" plants. Around 1900, Japanese honeysuckle was clearly invasive and is now found across the eastern U.S. from southern Maine to east Texas.

While Japanese honeysuckle prefers sunny locations in disturbed soil, it vigorously grows in numerous soil and lighting conditions including woodland habitats. It sprawls across the forest floor and onto small trees, grows fast, and outcompetes native plants and blocks their photosynthesis (Figure 2A). Japanese honeysuckle is a



Figure 1. Japanese honeysuckle produces white to cream flowers (A) during the summer. Mature berries (B) appear in autumn and last into winter.

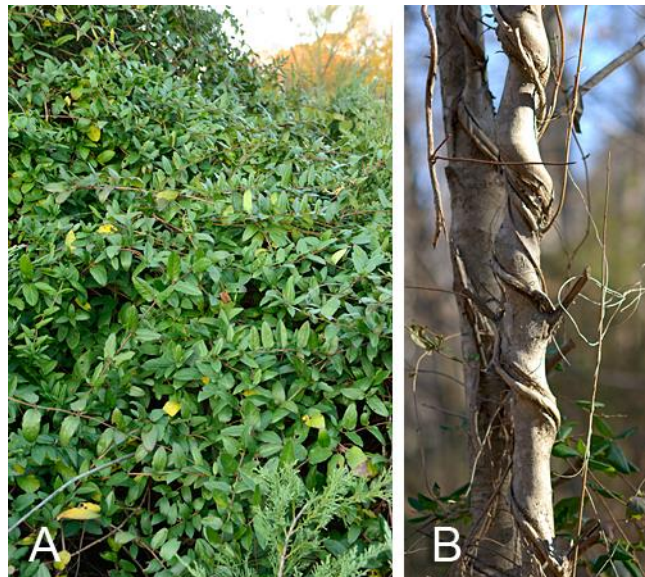


Figure 2. Japanese honeysuckle foliage smothers and weighs down the plants beneath (A). Its vines cause screw-like scarring in trees (B).

semi-evergreen, which enables it to conduct photosynthesis at varying efficiencies throughout the year. The vines climb up small trees and shrubs by twining around the host's trunk and branches. As the host grows over the years, the strangling honeysuckle vine interferes with wood development. The resulting corkscrew-like deformity (Figure 2B) weakens the trunk, so the bush or tree is more susceptible to breakage. In addition to physically damaging trees, some native pines and possibly other species are susceptible to Japanese honeysuckle's allelopathic properties, *i.e.*, it stunts growth or kills other plants by secreting chemicals into the soil. Further study is needed to see which other natives react to extracts from this noxious weed. Although browsing deer keep many plant species at bay, it has little impact on Japanese honeysuckle's rampant growth. Physically pulling this weed is the best way to manage it since herbicidal sprays can cause collateral damage to the non-target plants already struggling under the vine. Japanese honeysuckle is related to [Amur honeysuckle](#) (*L. maackii*), a non-native bush invading many parts of the eastern U.S. including Northern Virginia.

Some folks love Japanese honeysuckle's flowers. A gorgeous native substitute is coral or trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) with stunning scarlet blossoms erupting across the vine in May; the flowering continues until autumn at lower amounts. Outside of the blooming and fruiting seasons, an easy way to tell Japanese honeysuckle apart from trumpet honeysuckle is the former has separate, opposite leaves and the latter's leaves are fused. People liking Japanese honeysuckle blossoms' fragrance in their yard can enjoy any of the many aromatic native substitutes that are discussed in [The Scented Garden](#) (March 2022). There are always native alternatives for the landscape!

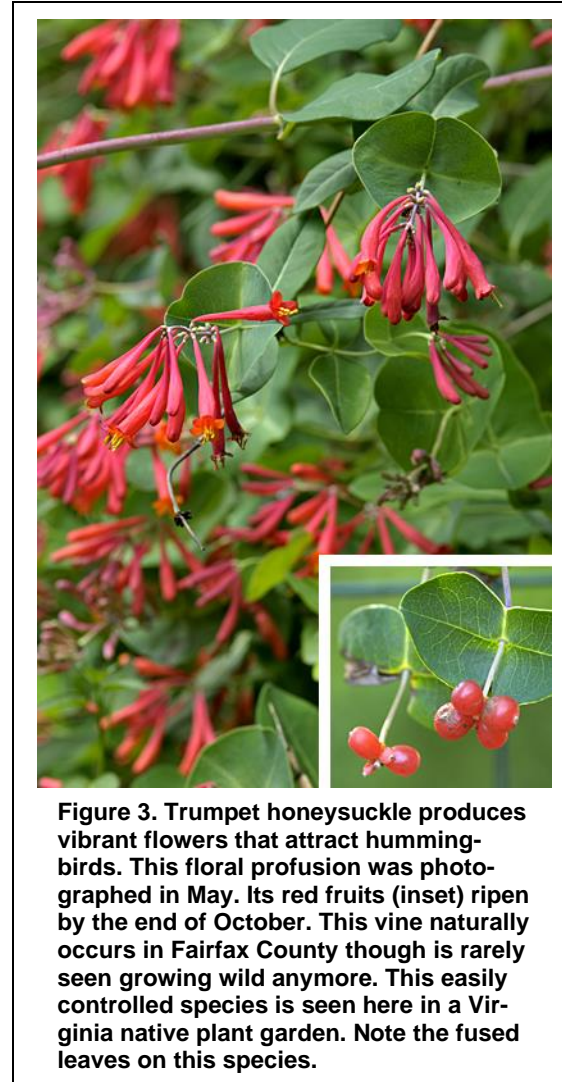


Figure 3. Trumpet honeysuckle produces vibrant flowers that attract hummingbirds. This floral profusion was photographed in May. Its red fruits (inset) ripen by the end of October. This vine naturally occurs in Fairfax County though is rarely seen growing wild anymore. This easily controlled species is seen here in a Virginia native plant garden. Note the fused leaves on this species.

For more information on Japanese honeysuckle:

<https://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3039>

<https://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/vine/lonjap/all.html>

https://www.in.gov/dnr/files/Japanese_Honeysuckle.pdf

<https://mdc.mo.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/japanesehoneysuckle.pdf>

<https://www.agriculture.nh.gov/publications-forms/documents/japanese-honeysuckle.pdf>

<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/invasives-your-woodland-japanese-honeysuckle>

Averill, Kristine M., et al. 2018. A regional assessment of white-tailed deer effects on plant invasion. *AoB PLANTS* 10(1) <https://doi.org/10.1093/aobpla/plx047>

Hardt, Richard A. 1986. Japanese honeysuckle: from "one of the best" to ruthless pest. *Arnoldia* 46:27-34. <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1986-46-2-japanese-honeysuckle-from-one-of-the-best-to-ruthless-pest.pdf>

Skulman, B.W., et al. May 2004. Evidence for allelopathic interference of Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) to loblolly and shortleaf pine regeneration. *Weed Science* 52(3):433-439. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4046941>

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