

## Invasive Species Profile: Amur Honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*)

By Greg Sykes ([greg@grsykes.com](mailto:greg@grsykes.com))

**Native Range:** across central to eastern Asia and Japan

**U.S. Introduction:** 1897 as an ornamental, New York Botanical Garden. First North American introduction: Dominion Arboretum, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada in 1896.

**Life Cycle:** perennial shrub

**Means of Spreading:** berries, eaten by birds which pass the seeds

**Commercially Available:** yes, with a shrinking market: some states ban or prohibit sales of Amur honeysuckle

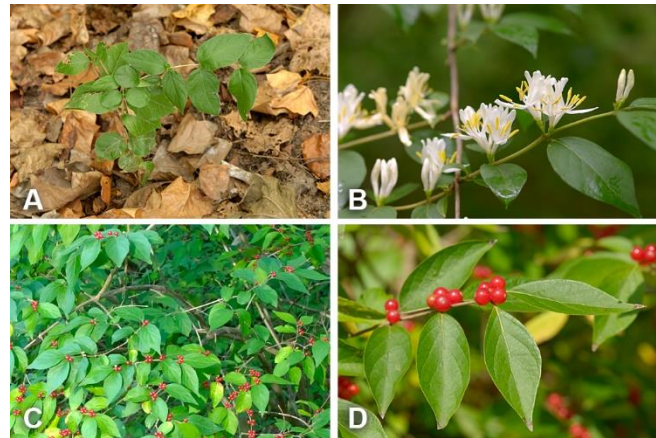
**Control Method:** hand-pull seedlings and saplings. Mature bushes may require mechanical tools, such as a Weed Wrench. Cut down large shrubs leaving two feet of defoliated branches; continue manually removing new growth until the plant dies (takes approximately two years). Herbicidal treatments may be used for large infestations.

**Good Alternative Species:** Fairfax natives with showy scarlet berries include winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) and red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*). Northern bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*) is native to Virginia's mountains. Southern bush honeysuckle (*D. sessilifolia*) is also an acceptable substitute, but its natural, northern-most range is North Carolina.

**Comments:** Several species of non-native invasive bush honeysuckles riddle areas of the United States. These shrubs are cousins of the immensely weedy [Japanese honeysuckle](#) vine, *L. japonica*. In Northern Virginia, the most common of these bothersome bushes is Amur honeysuckle. It is named after Richard Maack, a Russian naturalist who first collected this plant along the Amur River in 1855. Its first documented U.S. escape from cultivation was in the 1920s, outside of Chicago.

Amur honeysuckle grows anywhere from bright sunlit areas to forested shade. Local specimens typically top at around 10 feet. The leaves emerge in early spring, soon followed by white, fragrant blossoms. Throughout the summer months, this plant looks like a non-descript, green shrub. By late September, fruits ripen into bright red, four-berry-clusters at the base of leaf pairs. The yellowing leaves remain on the branches longer than most other bushes. Winter months see long, spindly branches arching from the base. The light, grayish beige bark flakes into elongated sections.

When found growing in the woods, people often mistake it as a native because it “looks like it belongs.” In fact, Amur honeysuckle was once thought to provide birds with fall-time food. However, these fruits lack the nutrition and high energy punch wildlife need at this time of year; that’s where native fruits enter into ecological importance, including lipid-rich poison ivy berries! Amur honeysuckles spread by animals eating the fruits and depositing the seeds elsewhere. Without any natural grazers or parasites effectively controlling plant growth, seedlings mature into bushes within several years and all the while shoving out native flora. Since wildlife avoids eating the Amur honeysuckle leaves, animals target the already dwindling native plants. On top of that, a recent mid-Western study authored by arthropod expert Brian Allan links higher occurrences of disease-carrying lone star ticks (*Amblyomma americanum*) to dense Amur honeysuckle stands! Animals—especially deer—inadvertently transport the ticks to these thickets, similar to what we learned in [Lyme Disease and Other Health Threats](#) (September 2009).



**Figure 1.** These images illustrate some forms by which Amur honeysuckle may be easily identified, including A) seedling, B) blossom close-up, C) branches with leaves and fruits, and D) close-up of berry clusters.

As Amur honeysuckle fades from nursery stocks, most properties with these bullying bushes have them unintentionally. Birds drop the seeds—usually along a fence line or existing bundle of bushes—and the plant matures. Some owners think by leaving it, they are “letting nature be” and “if it came from the forest, it must be OK,” but those sentiments could not be farther from the truth. Leaving it and allowing the plant to fruit only entrenches this invasive weed’s foothold. Please, give your yard a check, and if you have Amur honeysuckle, you can help the environment by replacing it with an alternative, native species.

For more information on Amur honeysuckle:

<http://www.invasive.org/eastern/midatlantic/loni.html>

<http://www.invasive.org/species/subject.cfm?sub=3040>

<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/31192>

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialplants/woody/exotichoneysuckles.html>

Fairfax County Celebrates Virginia’s First Invasive Plant Removal Day, pages 25-26 on:

[https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/49356/WRRC\\_vwc\\_200904.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/49356/WRRC_vwc_200904.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

For more on how ticks correlate to Amur honeysuckle infestations:

Allan, B.F., H.P. Dutra, L.S. Goessling, K. Barnett, J.M. Chase, R.J. Marquis, G.C. Pang, G.A. Storch, R.E. Thach and J.L. Orrock. 2010. Invasive honeysuckle eradication reduces tick-borne disease risk by altering host dynamics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107(43):18523-18527. <http://www.pnas.org/content/107/43/18523.full>

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