

Japanese Honeysuckle

(*Lonicera japonica* Thunb.)

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Wildland



Fig. 1. Japanese honeysuckle vine climbing up a tree.



Fig. 2. Flowers of Japanese honeysuckle.

Introduction

Problems Created

Japanese honeysuckle was introduced from Japan in the early 1800s and now is one of the most commonly encountered exotic weeds in the Mid-South. This species frequently overtops and displaces native plants and forestry species in any habitat, but particularly where natural or human activities creates edges. Japanese honeysuckle also is somewhat shade tolerant and can be found in relatively densely canopied forest. This species perenniates with the aid of well developed root and rhizome systems, by which it also is capable of spreading vegetatively, in addition to rooting at nodes along aboveground stems. Both features contribute substantially to its rapid dominance over native vegetation.

Regulations

Japanese honeysuckle is listed as a noxious weed in CT, MA, NH, and VT. In the southeast, Japanese honeysuckle is considered a severe invasion threat in KY, SC, and TN. It is considered one of the top ten invasive plants in GA, and is listed as a category one invasive in Florida. It is not presently listed in any noxious weed legislation in southern states.

Vegetative Growth

Japanese honeysuckle exhibits a semi-evergreen to evergreen life cycle and is readily identified during winter by its persistent green foliage. Its vines may climb and/or spread along the ground to lengths of 80'. These sprawling vines may form extensive cover over existing vegetation and choke it out. The vines grow slender and woody up to 2" in diameter. The mature stems are lighter shades of brown and hairy, the bark of which will fissure and flake as the plant ages. Leaves and branching stems are arranged oppositely on the main stem. Leaves are ovate to elliptic or longer with rounded bases and tips that may be blunt-pointed to round. The leaves range in length from about 1.5" to 2.5" and are about half as wide. Leaf margins of mature leaves usually are unlobed but young leaves and those in dense shade often will be highly lobed. Both surfaces of the leaf, as well as the young stems, will have some fine hairs, and the undersurface of leaves usually appears whitish.

Flowering

As mentioned above, Japanese honeysuckle is capable of vegetative growth by root and rhizome systems, in addition to rooting at nodes along aboveground stems. It can be seen flowering from April to August, or later, in our region, and this contributes to considerable success in sexual reproduction. Pairs of white to pale yellow (sometimes pinkish, but not red, as in our native honeysuckle) flowers are produced in leaf axils. These flowers are well known in the southern states for their fragrant odor during the spring and summer; this species is so well known that many are unaware of its exotic invasive status. The flowers also are visually attractive, with their five-lobed corollas and long, thin floral tube. Fruit and seeds typically are produced during summer and can be observed on the plants into the following spring. The fruit are more or less spherical in outline, ripening from green to a glossy black and producing two to three seeds each.

Dispersal

Animals are known to disseminate fruit and seed of this species, thus ensuring its establishment along edges, fence lines, hedgerows, and similar habitats.

Spread by

Japanese honeysuckle has been widely used in horticulture, and has escaped cultivation.

Habitat

Japanese honeysuckle primarily is an edge species, occurring most commonly and in highest densities along woodland edges, in thickets, and along fence rows; however, it also can be found in mature forests, thriving in tree gaps created by natural or artificial disturbance and persisting in partially shaded areas.

Distribution

Japanese honeysuckle was introduced to the United States in the early 1800s as an ornamental plant, but was also tried at erosion control and for wildlife cover and food. In fact, this species still is recommended as a wildlife food in some parts of the US. Japanese honeysuckle occurs in at least 38 states from California across the southern and midwestern states to New England and the Great Lakes region. It also is reported from Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Québec, Canada. Japanese honeysuckle is widespread throughout the MidSouth states.

Control Methods

Biological Control

No biological control agents are known for this species.

Chemical Control

Japanese honeysuckle is largely controlled through the use of herbicides. Metsulfuron methyl can be used as either a broadcast application or as a spot. Foliar herbicide applications can also be made using glyphosate as a broadcast application or spot treatments. Triclopyr can be applied as a broadcast application or as spot treatments. Imazapyr can be applied as a broadcast. Herbicides should be applied with an appropriate surfactant and ensure complete leaf wetting. Applications made between July and October are most effective as plants are actively growing and herbicide uptake should be optimal. Vines can be cut at the soil surface and the remaining stem bases sprayed or painted with undiluted triclopyr, or sprayed with a 1:1 solution of triclopyr and water. This method may be more labor intensive, but injury to non-target plants will be minimal.

Mechanical Control
Burning in spring will remove the ground mat of Japanese honeysuckle and sever the vines from the stem bases. Herbicide applications will need to be made to plants that re-grow.

Physical Control

None.

Table 1. Suggested chemical control methods for Japanese honeysuckle.

Herbicide	Method	Amount of Herbicide
glyphosate	Foliar spray, Broadcast	2 to 3 quarts per acre
	Foliar spray, Spot treatment	2% solution
triclopyr	Foliar spray, Broadcast	3 to 4 pints per acre
	Foliar spray, Spot treatment	3 to 5% solution
	Stem base treatment	Spray or paint undiluted concentrate on stem bases; spray a 1:1 solution of triclopyr and water to cut stem bases, with bark oil
metsulfuron methyl	Foliar spray, Broadcast	2 ounces per acre
imazapyr	Foliar spray, Broadcast	3 to 4 pints per acre

References

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