Bush Honeysuckle

Lonicera tatarica L.

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Alternate Names

Tatarian honeysuckle

Description

Bush honeysuckle is a bushy, finely branched shrub that grows up to 10 feet in height. The trunk has grayish-brown bark in long, thin scales. Branches are thin and flexible and brown to greenish-brown, and older stems are often hollow. Leaves are hairless, opposite, ovate to oblong, and 1–2½ inches long, with entire margins, obtuse to acute tips, and rounded bases. The flowers are pink or white, less than 1 inch long, and tubular, and they occur in pairs. The fruit is an orange to reddish-orange rounded berry, 3⁄16–5⁄16 inches wide, that has several seeds. Seeds are oval, flattened, and yellow.

Similar Species

In fruit, the orange or red berries of the exotic honeysuckle distinguish it from the purplish-black-berried native bearberry honeysuckle (*Lonicera involucrata* Banks ex Spreng.) which is found in Haines and southern Southeast Alaska.

Ecological Impact

Bush honeysuckle forms a dense shrub layer that shades out native vegetation in the woodland understory. It reduces the richness and cover of herb communities and delays establishment of new seedlings. Bush honeysuckle can alter habitats by decreasing light availability and depleting soil moisture and nutrients (Virginia DCR 2004). It can also reduce tree regeneration in early to mid-successional forests (Batcher and Stiles 2000).

Biology and Invasive Potential

Bush honeysuckle has high seed production and can spread vegetatively (Batcher and Stiles 2000, Charles 2001,

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Hoppes 1988). Outside of Alaska, it has been shown to invade disturbed sites as well as intact forests (Batcher and Stiles 2000), although areas with disturbance are most vulnerable to invasion (WDNR 2003). The fruits are distributed by birds and small mammals (Butterfield et al. 1996). Many state and private nurseries still sell bush honeysuckle (Batcher and Stiles 2000). Germination occurs shortly after dispersal. Seeds can remain viable for 2 or more years. Seedlings establish most readily on open ground or in areas with sparse understory (Butterfield et al. 1996). Bush honeysuckle grows in a wide variety of soils, soil moisture regimes, environmental conditions, and on all slope exposures. It can withstand periodic flooding, drought, shade, and temperatures of –58° to 113°F (Butterfield et al. 1996). Bush honeysuckle is listed as noxious in Vermont and has been declared an invasive weed in Wisconsin.

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Distribution and Abundance

Bush honeysuckle was first reported in Alaska in 1969 from Fairbanks and now is a cultivated ornamental in southcentral Alaska. In other states it has spread to lakes, river banks, marshes, roadsides, pastures, and wooded hillsides. Bush honeysuckle occurs along forest edges in Iowa, where it has the potential to modify existing native plant communities (Butterfield et al. 1996) and has invaded the understory of woodlands and marshes in Ohio (ODNR 2004). Bush honeysuckle is native to Europe and eastern Asia. It has not yet been found growing in wild or riparian

areas but is widely planted in Fairbanks and southcentral Alaska.

Management

Mechanical methods, including hand-pulling and cutting, must remove all root fragments in order to be effective. Mechanical and chemical control methods can be used in combination for control by cutting off the stem just above the ground and applying herbicide with a foam paint brush. Treatment must be repeated for at least 3–5 years in order to control new plants emerging from the seed bank (WDNR 2004, Batcher and Stiles 2000, Butterfield et al. 1996).

Notes

Birds consume the red berries of bush honeysuckle and spread the seeds into forests and woodlands where the plants readily establish. Another common name is "twin sisters" due to the paired fruits and flowers.

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