

GREEN GONE BAD

Featured Ornamental Plant Genus: *Lonicera* (Bush Honeysuckles)

Some exotic ornamental plants behave badly when they escape from the place they are planted. Infestations of these plants have negative impacts on natural environments.

Several culprits can be found in the genus: *Lonicera*

Exotic bush honeysuckle species including *Lonicera fragrantissima* (fragrant honeysuckle), *L. maackii* (Amur honeysuckle), *L. morrowii* (Morrow's honeysuckle), and *L. X bella* (hybrid, pretty honeysuckle) have been observed and recorded growing outside of cultivation in South Carolina, primarily in the



Lonicera maackii

upstate. Other bush honeysuckle species such as *L. standishii* (Standish's honeysuckle), *L. tatarica* (Tartarian honeysuckle), and *L. xylosteum* (European fly honeysuckle) have escaped cultivation in other parts of the United States. Bush honeysuckle species are in the family *Caprifoliaceae*. The native range of bush honeysuckle species is Eurasia (Japan, China, Korea, Manchuria, Turkey and southern Russia). These species have been introduced to the United States for use as ornamentals, for wildlife cover, and for soil erosion control.



Lonicera maackii
bark of
large
branch

Exotic bush honeysuckles are upright, generally deciduous shrubs that range from 6 to 15 feet in height. The 1-2 ½ inch, egg-shaped leaves are opposite along the stem and short-stalked. Older stems are often hollow (native honeysuckles such as *Lonicera flava* and *L. canadensis* have solid stems). Pairs of fragrant, tubular flowers less than an inch long are borne along the stem in the leaf axils. Flower color varies from creamy white to pink or crimson in some varieties of Tartarian honeysuckle. Flowering generally occurs from early to late spring, but varies for each species and cultivar. The fruits are red to orange, many-seeded berries.

Exotic bush honeysuckles fruit prolifically and rapid spread is attributed to birds and mammals dispersing the seeds. Bush honeysuckles readily invade open woodlands, old fields, and other disturbed sites. In established populations, vegetative sprouting also aids in the persistence of these exotic shrubs. *Lonicera maackii* is one of the first plants to leaf out, giving it a competitive advantage. This shrub can bear fruit when it is as young as 3 to 5 years old. This species has become well established in natural areas in York County, S.C. where land managers such as those at Anne Springs Close Greenway are attempting to control it.



Lonicera fragrantissima



Lonicera fragrantissima

Exotic bush honeysuckles can rapidly invade and overtake a site, forming a dense shrub layer that crowds and shades out native plant species and prevents tree seedling establishment. They alter habitats by decreasing light availability, by depleting soil moisture and nutrients, and possibly by releasing toxic chemicals that prevent other plant species from growing in the vicinity. Exotic bush honeysuckles may compete with native bush honeysuckles and other native plants for pollinators, resulting in reduced seed set for native species. The fruits of exotic bush honeysuckles, while abundant and rich in carbohydrates, provide limited nutrient and fat content compared with native species. Migrating birds require nutrient-rich food sources with high fat content to complete their long annual migrations.



Lonicera morrowii

It may not be widely known among horticulturalists and landscapers that this plant can be harmful to natural habitats. Please consider removing this species from your inventory. Many native plants make excellent substitutes for exotic bush honeysuckles for home landscaping and wildlife planting. Examples include spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), ink-berry (*Ilex glabra*), swamp rose (*Rosa palustris*), wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), red or black chokecherry (*Aronia arbutifolia* or *melanocarpa*), and arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*).

Visit <http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3040> for details

See also: <http://www.se-eppc.org/southcarolina/> and <http://www.se-eppc.org/>

