

Asian Bush Honeysuckle

The Asian Bush Honeysuckles are one of the most commonly seen invasive plants in Central Indiana. Bush honeysuckles are upright, deciduous (lose their leaves in winter) shrubs that range from 6 to 15 feet tall. Pairs of flowers are borne along stems in leaf axils in late spring to early summer, where the red to orange fruits are produced. Seeds of these shrubs are spread by birds into natural areas where they become invasive, crowding out native plants. They form a dense shrub thicket that competes with native plants for light, water, and nutrients and



crowding many out. The fruits of these honeysuckles don't supply the high fat, nutrient rich food for migrating birds that are supplied by many native plant species.

Mechanical and chemical methods are the primary means for controlling exotic bush honeysuckles. Hand removal of seedlings or small plants may be useful for light infestations, but care should be taken not to disturb the soil any more than necessary. Hand pulling is best done when the soil is moist to insure removal of the root system. Even then some root fragments will likely remain in the soil and may resprout. In shaded forest habitats, where exotic bush honeysuckles tend to be less resilient, repeated clippings to ground level, during the growing season, may result in high mortality. Clipping must be repeated at least once yearly because bush honeysuckles that are cut once and left to grow will often form stands that are more dense and productive than they were prior to cutting.

Seedlings of exotic bush honeysuckles can also be controlled by application of a systemic herbicide, like glyphosate at a 1 percent solution, sprayed onto the foliage or applied by sponge. Well established stands of exotic bush honeysuckles are probably best managed by cutting the stems to ground level and painting or spraying the stumps with a slightly higher rate of glyphosate (2-3%) or other labeled herbicide. When using herbicides always follow label directions.

There are many native alternatives to the bush honeysuckle once they are removed from the landscape. These include spicebush, shrub dogwoods, red chokecherry, winterberry, serviceberry, and viburnums.



Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) forms a neat, spreading mound 6 to 10 feet high and slightly wider. The stems smell spicy when crushed. This native plant adapts to wet or dry soils, and to sun or shade. Female plants have scarlet berry-like fruit.

Two native dogwood shrubs are hardy to the coldest areas (USDA zone 3) in either sun or partial shade. The silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*) gets 6 to 8 feet high and wide, while the gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) gets 8 to 10 feet high and at least that wide. Both have upright, oval habits. Yellow-white flowers on the silky dogwood produce bluish fruits attractive to birds. Fragrant flowers on the gray dogwood in June produce white fruit on the red stems in fall. Unless pruned, the gray dogwood can wide colonies of stems.

Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) is a slow grower, eventually reaching 6 to 10 feet high, and half that wide. This native plant has an open and upright habit in landscapes, but with suckers will form a broad mound. Once established, this plant will tolerate drought. Clusters of white flowers in spring produce red fruit in the fall. This plant will tolerate occasionally wet soils.

There are many cultivars of our native winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) to choose from. The dense, twiggy growth of this deciduous holly provides cover for birds by summer, and fruit for them in winter. Keep in mind if planting these that you'll need a male plant or two for pollination. Winterberry is often seen in natural areas in wet soils, although this plant tolerates dry soils as well.

There are several native species of serviceberry that form large shrubs, or multi-stem small trees. The Allegheny serviceberry (*Amelanchier laevis*) is perhaps the most commonly found in our area. Reaching 15 to 25 feet high, and half that wide, it has an

upright and open habit. It grows well in sun or shade. The attractive white spring flowers are followed in summer by edible black fruits, then in fall by attractive red to orange leaves.

There are several native viburnums you could use as alternatives to bush honeysuckles, but keep in mind species have varying susceptibility to a new pest, the Viburnum leaf beetle. Witherod (*V. cassinoides*) is less susceptible, reaching 8 to 10 feet high and wide. White flowers lead to fruits that start green, then change to red before black. The orange-red fall leaves are attractive. Witherod is quite hardy in wide-ranging light and soil conditions.

#