

# Vermont Invasive Exotic Plant Fact Sheet

## Japanese Honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica* Thunb. Honeysuckle Family Vermont Class B Noxious Weed

**Description:** Japanese honeysuckle is a woody perennial trailing or twining vine. Its individual runners can grow more than 30 feet (9 meters) in length; it roots at the nodes of the pubescent runners. Leaves are simple, opposite and oval to oblong in shape. Occasionally, young leaves are lobed. Japanese honeysuckle's flowers are fragrant, two-lipped, 1 to 2 inches (2.5-5 cm) in length, and white, changing to yellow with age. Fruit is a many seeded, purple-black, pulpy berry. Japanese honeysuckle flowers from late May through the summer, and fruits from July through the fall. Late in the season, it continues photosynthesis after most associated native plants have become dormant, thus being one of the last plants to lose its leaves in the fall. Japanese honeysuckle (including the varieties) is easily distinguished from native honeysuckle vines by its upper leaves and by its berries. The uppermost pairs of leaves of Japanese honeysuckle are distinctly separate, while those of native honeysuckle vines are connate, or fused to form a single leaf through which the stem grows. Japanese honeysuckle has black berries, in contrast to the red to orange berries of native honeysuckle vines.

**Habitat:** Japanese honeysuckle is found in thickets, borders of woods and roadsides, and meadows. It occurs primarily in areas where natural or human disturbances have provided a light gap in the canopy. It can also be found in shaded areas, but most rapid growth occurs in areas exposed to sun.

**Threat:** Japanese honeysuckle invades by seeds (primarily), underground rhizomes, and aboveground runners. It spreads rapidly and outcompetes native vegetation due to wide seed dispersal, rapid growth rate, extended growing season, ability to capture resources both above- and below-ground, wide habitat adaptability, and lack of natural enemies. Once established, the vine may literally engulf small trees and

shrubs, which collapse under the weight, and



(Gleason, Henry A. 1952. *New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*, Hofner Press, New York. Vol. 3.)

**Threat continued:** few plants survive beneath the dense canopy. Japanese honeysuckle has an additional competitive edge as it grows during part or all of the winter, when many native species are dormant. This semi-evergreen character allows Japanese honeysuckle to photosynthesize at winter temperatures and light levels. The shade it casts during early spring may inhibit ephemeral herbs that complete their life cycle in the six weeks prior to deciduous tree leaf-out.

**Distribution:** In North America, Japanese honeysuckle is naturalized from Maine, Massachusetts, and New York, south to Texas and Florida and west to Missouri and Indiana. Japanese honeysuckle was introduced to North America from Japan in the 1800's as an ornamental shrub and vine. It has also been used for soil erosion control along railroads and highways. The berries of Japanese honeysuckle are a source of food for wildlife, thus dispersing the seeds widely.

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## Japanese Honeysuckle Honeysuckle Family (*Caprifoliaceae*)

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**Control:** Control methods for Japanese honeysuckle in areas of heavy and light infestations include mowing, grazing, prescribed burning, and the application of herbicides. Mowing and grazing reduces the spread of vegetative stems but does not completely remove the vegetation; instead, vigorous resprouting increases stem density. Small populations may be controlled by careful hand pulling, grubbing with a hoe or shovel, and removing trailing vines. Soil disturbance should be avoided in infested areas to minimize germination of seed in the seedbank. Cut material can take root and should therefore be removed from the site (not practical with most infestations).

The most effective treatment is a foliar application of glyphosate herbicide (trade names Roundup, Rodeo or Accord), applied after native vegetation is dormant and when temperatures are near and preferably above freezing. Applications within 2 days of the first killing frost are more effective than applications later in the winter. Care must be taken not to harm native species as the glyphosate herbicide is non-selective. Fire removes above-ground vegetation, and reduces new growth, but does not kill most Japanese honeysuckle roots, and surviving roots produce new sprouts that return to pre-burn levels of cover within a few years. Combining fire and herbicides may prove to be more effective than either method by itself if late autumn or winter burns are used to reduce Japanese honeysuckle biomass and all resprouts are then treated with a foliar application of glyphosate about a month after they emerge.

### References:

Nuzzo, Victoria. 1997. *Element Stewardship Abstract for Japanese Honeysuckle*. The Nature Conservancy. <http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/esadocs/documnts/lonijap.rtf>

\*This fact sheet was adapted by permission from The Connecticut Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.



For more information about Vermont's invasive exotic plant species or if you would like to know how you can help, please contact:

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