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What's that Shrub?

Bush Honeysuckle. Road ditches are full of it. Wooded areas are being invaded by it! The bright red berries and still green foliage sure make it stand out! Unfortunately, for as much fall/winter color as the berries provide, bush honeysuckle species – Amur or Tartarian for us in eastern Kansas – are actually invasive, and have fast become a real nuisance for landowners.

The very noticeable berries are clustered around the stem and until this last cold snap, the leaves have kept a bright green color. Growing anywhere from six to over twenty feet in height, the one-time landscape shrub has become a serious understory invader from here to Ohio. In fact, some states have even included it on their noxious weed lists!

We have some native honeysuckles, so what's the problem? While the native honeysuckles are vining (think Japanese honeysuckle), the bush structure of these invasive honeysuckles makes them more competitive. Add to that the fact that their extended growing season (they tend to leaf out much earlier than other trees and shrubs and stay green well in to the fall) gives them a huge competitive advantage over native species. Because of their vigorous growth, they can take over a woodland understory, reducing the number of native woodland wildflowers and other shrubs. The bottom line is this: if you want to promote native species on your property, then controlling bush honeysuckles is needed!

Multiple control options are available. They aren't that deep rooted, so honeysuckle seedlings can be readily hand pulled when soil is damp. Once they get much size or if infestations are large, chemical control might be a necessity. Foliar applications of glyphosate (i.e., Roundup) in late summer and fall work well as do applications of Crossbow (2,4-D + triclopyr).

If you do try controlling by cutting, be sure and treat the stumps (cutting alone results in lots of resprouting!!). Treat cut stump areas with Tordon RTU (picloram), or concentrated (20% - 50%) glyphosate. Several studies have shown basal spraying with triclopyr (Garlon) not to be effective, while basal applications with 2,4-D or picloram products work well, using an oil carrier to penetrate the bark. Cut stump and basal treatments can be done when the areas to be sprayed are dry and not frozen. Always follow all label instructions when using pesticides!