

Asiatic Bush Honeysuckle: What Happens When Non-native Invasive Plants Escape Cultivation?

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Ah, the beautiful and exotic bush honeysuckle; its fragrant and visually captivating flowers are magnificent. Its lush green leaves are geometrically positioned, opposite on tan branches. Moreover, the size of this fan-shaped shrub is reasonably manageable as an ornamental plant because of its maximum height growth of approximately 20 feet. Additionally, the ripened, glossy berries are tasty edibles to an abundance of wildlife species. It sounds like the perfect ornamental shrub to plant in your yard, right? Not so fast, this wonderful shrub is non-native and very invasive.

Originally from Asia, the bush honeysuckle was originally introduced into North America in the 1700s and again in the 1800s. It was widely used as an ornamental plant for landscape areas and a wildlife shrub for ample browsing. This shrub species is a prolific producer of fruit and seed that is browsed and spread by several wildlife species such as birds, deer, and small mammals. Because the Asian continent has several beautiful bush honeysuckle shrubs, several species were

introduced to North America (Amur honeysuckle, Morrow's honeysuckle, Tartarian honeysuckle, sweet-breath-of-spring honeysuckle, and Bell's honeysuckle); thus the group name, Asiatic bush honeysuckle.

Today, the range of Asiatic bush honeysuckle in the United States extends from Maine to North Carolina and west to Missouri. There are some cases as far south as Georgia, west to Texas, and now in North Alabama. This exotic honeysuckle is relatively shade tolerant and will quickly occupy a forest understory. It is believed that this plant was introduced into

our state by homesteaders planting it in their yards in Huntsville. Over the years, the shrub escaped cultivation and invaded neighboring disturbed sites, roadside areas, and forest openings. It eventually escaped the yards of Huntsville and infested the Monte Sano Preserve as well as the Monte Sano State Park, ignoring the lag time of most non-native invasive plants.

The Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama recognized the problem with Asiatic bush honeysuckle in the Monte Sano Preserve. This non-profit organization, dedicated to preserving lands for public use, has the goals of enhancing recreation, education, conservation, and prosperity in North Alabama. To accomplish these goals in the Preserve, the organization initiated an eradication project by first determining the most effective method of controlling this invasive plant that had spread throughout 600 acres on the preserve.

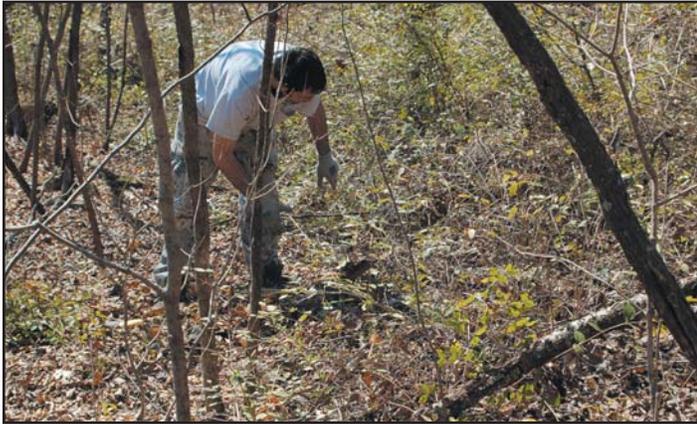
Andy Prewett, Land Manager for the Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama, has been working on this project in the Monte Sano Preserve for several years. Control of the shrub is considerably difficult and labor intensive, but several methods are being implemented. The main control used during the last few years has been removing the plant species from the site. Concerned citizens and local students

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These volunteers at Monte Sano Preserve demonstrate that control of the shrub is considerably difficult and labor intensive. Clipping it down to ground level and spraying the stump with an herbicide mix tends to be the preferred method of removal. Using pick mattocks to dig the plant out of the ground by its roots is another common method used.

volunteer their services toward this effort, while the Land Trust provides the equipment (brush clippers, herbicide spray, and pick mattocks). Clipping the shrub down to ground level and spraying the stump with an herbicide mix tends to be the preferred method of removal, because seed from native plants are not disturbed. Using pick mattocks to dig the plant out of the ground by its roots is another common method used. This technique definitely removes the exotic plant, but can also disturb native plant seed and remove fertile top soil.

Since this exotic species can spread at a rate of approximately one acre a year, controlling its expansion is first priority. Volunteers task for hours and often clear a sizeable area. Usually, they begin to work at controlling the shrub at the “head” or forefront of the infestation, and work backwards towards the source. This method drastically decreases the spread. Approximately seven acres have already been cleared since this project started. While cutting the shrub down to the ground may not eliminate the species, it

controls and reduces the spread. Herbicides can be easily applied to a stump in the understory, and natural vegetation can regenerate. Wildflowers, forbs, grasses, and legumes will begin to occupy and diversify the site, as evidenced in the treated areas. There are, however, treated areas where the honeysuckle has returned. This is a common problem with most non-native invasive plant species. Several treatments may be needed to completely eradicate this exotic shrub.

The work to eradicate and control Asiatic bush honeysuckle is demanding and will require repeated treatments. Even then, there is no guarantee that it will be completely eliminated from the Monte Sano Preserve. So, are these efforts in vain? Not at all; during the winter months when most of the deciduous understory vegetation is dormant, the results are quite vivid. The contrast of controlled areas against the areas not controlled is definitely noticeable. Progress may appear to be slow, but the volunteers’ accomplishments remain warranted and needed.

New methods to control Asiatic bush honeysuckle are being initiated. The Land Trust is implementing a research project to compare and contrast the herbicides, *Round Up*

and *Pathfinder II*. Future test plots have been identified and established. A comparison between the two herbicides will be made on their effectiveness and cost. This project is being funded by a grant from the Alabama Forestry Commission and the USDA Forest Service.

The efforts of these volunteers should definitely be recognized; they are providing a service to restore the ecosystem of this Preserve back to a healthier state. What can other concerned citizens of North Alabama do to restore this serene area? Besides being reactive by providing labor to control Asiatic bush honeysuckle, concerned citizens can also be proactive and substitute the planting of this shrub with native, flowering shrubs. There are other admirable activities that citizens can do to prevent the existence and spread of Asiatic bush honeysuckle. If Alabamians want to become more involved in the eradication/control project in the Monte Sano Preserve, contact Andy Prewett of the Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama for more information (Andy@landtrust-hsv.org). 🏠

References

Miller, James H. Non-native Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Southern Research Station, 2006.

Prewett, Andy. The Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama. Andy@landtrust-hsv.org.

Site of test plots is marked to compare herbicide treatments.

