

## Invasive Vines are Difficult to Control

By Susan Camp

Native plants are in fashion these days, and they should be. I follow and occasionally comment on several native plant Facebook pages, and I see that a lot of novice gardeners are trying to decrease the number of exotic species in their gardens and replace them with native species. Confusion often arises over which plants are invasive and which ones are simply native to another country or continent.

A North American native plant is one that existed on this continent before European settlers arrived. Every state and region of a state has its own specific native plants. This means that plants native to our coastal region are not necessarily native to the Piedmont, Shenandoah Valley, or mountainous regions of Virginia. Native plants are more likely to thrive in their natural habitat without excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, but it doesn't mean that such plants should never be grown in Coastal Virginia.

Non-native plants are those that were introduced, intentionally or accidentally, primarily from Europe and Asia, but also from Africa and Australia. Many non-native plants have naturalized to regional environments without becoming invasive. Unfortunately, some of the lovely trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials that developed in far-away places ended up interfering with our natural ecosystem. They don't provide food and habitat for the insects, birds, and other critters, and they may require more pesticides and fertilizers, leading to contamination of our waterways.

Many of us who live on the Middle Peninsula fight an endless battle against the encroachment of invasive plants that seem to spring up overnight. I haven't spent a lot of time working outside in the last month or two, but a recent day of exploring the conditions in our woods revealed the return of Japanese honeysuckle, that beautiful green vine with the sweetly fragrant yellow and white flowers, so reminiscent of childhood summers in Virginia.

Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), also called Chinese honeysuckle (*L. sinensis*) was introduced to the United States in 1862 as an ornamental vine and also used for erosion control and wildlife habitat. It has naturalized throughout the eastern and central regions of the United States.

Japanese honeysuckle is a woody vine that spreads along the ground, producing stolons, slender stems that trail along the ground and produce roots at intervals called nodes. The pesky vine can climb vertically into trees and shrubs, depleting other plants of light, moisture, and nutrition and strangling tree trunks. After flowering, pulpy black berries develop that are non-toxic to wildlife, but poisonous to humans.

Japanese honeysuckle with its oval, dark green leaves and familiar two-lipped yellow and white flowers, is difficult to eradicate. Small growths of trailing honeysuckle can be dug up or mowed to the ground, but are unlikely to be totally eradicated. Remove vines in trees as you would English ivy by cutting the vines around the base of the tree so that the rest of the vine will die. Glyphosate, a non-selective herbicide, will kill *L. japonica*, but it will also destroy any

surrounding vegetation. Always follow container instructions when using any type of chemical herbicide.

Several native alternatives can be planted instead of Japanese honeysuckle without concern for invasiveness, although they can become aggressive if not controlled. Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), and wild honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioica*) are all attractive vines that make effective groundcover and support wildlife. Virginia creeper leaves often turn reddish-burgundy in the fall. Native honeysuckle flowers are bright orange to scarlet and lack the heady fragrance of Japanese honeysuckle. Trumpet vine or trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) is sometimes suggested as an alternative to Japanese honeysuckle, but I urge caution if you plant this vine. It bears gorgeous red trumpet flowers, but it will sprout everywhere unless strictly controlled.

See DCR and Virginia Native Plant Society “Invasive Alien Species of Virginia” Fact Sheet “Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica* Thunberg) and other fact sheets on various alien invasive species.