

# PEST ALERT

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## Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Plant Industry

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### ***Lonicera japonica* Thunb., Japanese honeysuckle, a recently listed State Noxious Weed**

Alexander J. de la Paz, Bureau of Entomology, Nematology and Plant Pathology  
[DPIHelpline@FDACS.gov](mailto:DPIHelpline@FDACS.gov) or 1-888-397-1517

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The perennial woody vine, *Lonicera japonica* Thunb. (Caprifoliaceae, the honeysuckle family), has been added to the Florida Noxious Weed and Invasive Species List. This plant was presented to the Noxious Weed Review Committee. A weed assessment by the UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas provided background information and analysis of the invasive potential of this species (UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas, 2020). *Lonicera japonica* is also listed by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council as an invasive species that has altered natural plant communities (Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, 2019).

This attractive woody vine was introduced to Florida in 1875 for agricultural and ornamental purposes, but the invasive characteristics of the plant were soon recognized. In addition to being a popular ornamental for its showy, fragrant flowers, Japanese honeysuckle has been used in places such as highways to control erosion and stabilize banks, as well as winter forage for deer. It displaces native plant species by growing rapidly and outcompeting native species for light, space, water and nutrients. It forms dense stands and spreads rapidly by both vegetative and sexual reproduction.

The Noxious Weed Review Committee found that the species exhibits the following characteristics typical of invasive agricultural and environmental weeds:

- Broad climate suitability (environmental versatility)
- Shown to form dense thickets
- Naturalized beyond native range
- Propagated both by seeds and vegetative reproduction
- Climbing or smothering growth habit
- Weed of agriculture

Based on the assessment of the invasion of natural areas by this species, *Lonicera japonica* is now included on the list of regulated plants in Florida. It is unlawful to introduce, multiply, possess, move or release any noxious weed or invasive plant regulated by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, except under permit issued by the department.

#### **IDENTIFICATION**

This species is a perennial, climbing or trailing woody vine growing in disturbed areas nearly throughout the state. The stems are reddish-brown and pubescent when young, becoming smooth in age. The leaves are opposite and petiolate with the blade ovate, elliptic or oblong, 3-8 cm long and 1.5-4 cm wide, with the upper and lower surfaces sparsely pubescent. The flowers are borne solitary or in pairs in an axillary or terminal cluster and are subtended by a pair of small bract-like, petiolate leaves (Figure 1 and Figure 2). There are five narrowly triangular sepals united at the base. The corolla is five-lobed, tubular, bilabiate and white or cream-colored, becoming yellowish in age. The five stamens are exerted from the corolla along with the style that attaches to an inferior ovary. The fruit is a black, subglobose berry 5-8 mm long, with numerous seeds 2-3 mm long. (UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants; Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2020a; Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2020b).



## SIMILAR SPECIES IN FLORIDA

*Lonicera sempervirens*, coral honeysuckle, a native species in the same genus as Japanese honeysuckle (*L. japonica*), is similar in several ways. Both species are perennial woody vines, but *L. japonica* tends to show a more aggressive and invasive growth habit than the native species. Both species also have desirably showy, fragrant flowers. The main difference between the two species lies in the flowers and the bract-like leaves subtending the flowers. *Lonicera sempervirens* has red, tubular flowers with subequal lobes much shorter than the corolla tube, while *L. japonica* has white, tubular flowers with very unequal lobes nearly as long as the corolla tube. The subtending bract-like leaves of *L. sempervirens* are perfoliate (connected; the stem thus appearing to pass through the middle), while those of *L. japonica* are petiolate (Wunderlin, *et al.*, 2020b).

## DISTRIBUTION

Japanese honeysuckle is native to East Asia where it grows in scrubs, sparse forests, mountain slopes, stony places and roadsides. It has been introduced and now widely naturalized in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, the Pacific Islands and South America. In the continental United States, it is documented from most states but is especially abundant in the southeast. In Florida, it has been documented in the panhandle and northern-central peninsula.

## REFERENCES

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- UF/IFAS Assessment of Non-Native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas. (2020).** <https://assessment.ifas.ufl.edu/assessments/lonicera-japonica/> (Last accessed 4 December 2020).
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**Figure 1.** *Lonicera japonica* flower.  
Photo by Keith Bradley,  
[Atlas of Florida Plants](#)



**Figure 2.** *Lonicera japonica* flower.  
Photo by Allen Boatman, [Atlas of Florida Plants](#)