



# “Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays  
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



## Honeysuckle

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I'm so happy I write these columns for it seems I'm learning new things every time.

Winter now past (or close to it), I was eager to get back to what's outside at this time of year. I'm set to write about a prime nuisance in many parts of my yard.



Yet when I go to the internet (irregular. Leaves egg-shaped, slightly heart-shaped at the base. Berries red. 4-10' high. Spring.) I find a number of varieties for sale.

WHAT? Various colors, hyping its strong scent (perfumes try to imitate it), and one plant that promises less of an aroma. Even stranger – these sites can't quite make up their minds if honeysuckle is a bush or a vine. It's suggested some will happily just crawl along the ground. These ads make it sound like the decision is yours – want to cover a fence, a corner of the

house or just have it beside a walkway? I've never seen anything quite so versatile.

If honeysuckle is all it's hyped up to be, then why do my yard people think so little of it?

The Internet rides in again! Ohio State University has a web page: Controlling Non-Native Invasive Plants in Ohio Forests: Bush honeysuckle.” Aha! That, I suspect, sounds more like it.

“Non-Native”? Let's start right there. Where did it come from, who brought it . . . and (the plot thickens) why? No names are given to protect the innocent though I imagine, at the time, these importers thought they were doing something really great (and, of course, profitable). It was sold as an ornamental, for wildlife food and cover, and to be used as erosion control. Why not introduce it? Sounds like a great addition, doesn't it?

Too bad nobody back then realized this non-native plant thrives in sunlight but will also tolerate moderate shade. In fact, it's so



happy to be here it can invade (quite aggressively) abandoned fields, roadsides, right-of-ways, edges of woodlands, and the interiors of open woodlands.

Personally, I like what I have (or pretty much ignore it) and I've seen no sign whatever it plans to invade. Plants line the driveway by the entrance which I still think is a lovely way to greet people.

So, what does ignoramus me know? Honeysuckle can shade out native woodland species which are obviously more desirable. They can also form thickets so dense that any other vegetation is wiped out.



Honeysuckle fruit (those pretty red berries) is rich in carbohydrates but is lacking in the high-fat and nutrient-rich content that most of our native plants have to sustain migrating birds. Ohio feels that there will be a “huge impact” on migrating birds if native food sources are drastically reduced. In a perfect world I would agree, but I think, considering the spread of humans, the birds should be grateful for anything they can still get.

Turns out there are three common kinds of bush honeysuckle. Tartarian, Amur and

Morrow although the latter two can hybridize to create Bella which, considering its parentage, is difficult to identify.

Let's stick with the one I know, my driveway companion, Tartarian Honeysuckle.

The National Audubon Society speaks of the family: mostly shrubs, sometimes vines or herbs [yes], commonly with showy flowers usually in a branched or forked cluster.

Flowers: Radially or bilaterally symmetrical. Calyx with 5 small sepals; corolla with 5 petals united into a slender tube, flared into a trumpet-shaped end or forming an upper and lower lip; stamens usually 5; all these parts attached at top of ovary. Leaves: Opposite, simple or compound. Fruit: Berry, drupe, or capsule.



Newcomb's Wildflower Guide: Leaves smooth beneath. Pink (sometimes white) deeply lobed flowers, somewhat irregular. Leaves egg-shaped, slightly heart-shaped at the base. Berries red. 4-10' high. Spring.

Peterson suggests “see Early Azalea.” which is their idea of a honeysuckle. But adds the Family in an introduction. (Caprifoliaceae) Mostly woody shrubs and vines, rarely herbs. Leaves opposite. Flowers usually bell-shaped, funnel-like or tubular; the corolla usually flaring into 5 regular or irregular lobes or points. Generally, 5 stamens.

Apparently, it snuck in carrying its bad reputation but it can stay here. I have lots of open space and am happy to see good-sized flowering bushes along the edges.

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