

FRIENDS OF THE WOODS

April 1, 2021 edition



Invasive Species

The purpose of this newsletter is to raise awareness of invasive species and the harm they can do to an environment, including making it very difficult for native plants to flourish. The “Friends of the Woods” volunteer group has been removing invasive plant species such as garlic mustard, multiflora rose, poison hemlock and barberry throughout the Knox County Parks. They also have begun to make improvements to the Honey Run Waterfall area by implementing a restoration area within the park, and hope to inaugurate similar projects in other parks.

First Wave of Spring Green is Invasive Honeysuckle

By: Sue Hagan

As we welcome the month of April and our true entrance into spring, the outdoor space around is greening up, gradually but steadily. Just yesterday, everything still looked drab and gray; then seemingly overnight, roadsides and forest edges erupted into a bright spring green — wave after wave of it grabbing our attention as we’re driving or walking along.

To the layman — meaning mostly everyone — this is a cause for rejoicing. Once again winter has been beaten back and new spring life is asserting itself. Hooray!

But now comes the part we don’t like so much. That first big wave of green, taking place now, is likely to be Asian bush honeysuckle, a group of non-native invasive plants that are eager to crowd out native spring plants. It used to be, not so long ago, that we could see into the forest while driving past on a rural road. Now the forest edge often is crowded with tangled foliage blocking our view into the stand of trees. That tangle is likely non-native honeysuckle, which just loves disturbed soil — such as road rights-of-way next to forest edges. And once those first tall (up to 15 feet) shrubs establish themselves along the edge, more and more of them will push farther into woods.

Why do we care? For one thing, at this time of year, deciduous forests are home to the ephemeral wildflowers that are such a thrill to see in April and May. Woodland wildflowers flourish in early spring when the still-bare tree branches allow sunlight down to the forest floor. But if that floor is full of honeysuckle or other invasive plants, the sunlight is blocked. The wildflowers cannot compete, and we visitors miss out on spring beauties, hepatica, mayapples and trilliums, among others. A dense layer of Asian honeysuckle also can



affect canopy tree growth, and increase the number of ticks and tick-related illnesses.

Invasive honeysuckle fools us into tolerating it because it has pretty green leaves, delicate blossoms and a lusciously sweet aroma. And birds and wildlife like its berries, although studies have shown the berries to be less than nutritious. And the damage Asian honeysuckle does, in lessening plant diversity, overshadows any pleasing attributes.

There are four varieties of invasive Asian honeysuckle; three are bushes and one is a vine, and all four are present to variable degrees in Knox County. [There is a native honeysuckle species (*Lonicera sempervirens*) native to the eastern U.S., but it’s not present in Knox County, according to E. Lucy Braun, author of *The Woody Plants of Ohio*.]

Copy this link for more information, which includes descriptions of each plant and differentiating features that set them apart from native honeysuckle varieties. <https://www.oipc.info/invasive-list.html>

Invasive honeysuckle is a tough plant to eradicate altogether. Pulling is possible with young plants and when the soil is wet, but usually cutting and chopping is done. Those techniques should be followed by chemical treatments; otherwise, the plant will regenerate.

Lori Totman, director of the Knox County Park District, said that dense honeysuckle growth had been removed a number of times from highly visible areas in the parks, such as between the parking lot and the children’s natural play area at Wolf Run Regional Park; it is regrowing in places, however. As time and resources allow, she hopes to tackle this invasive species again, with the help of a staff member certified in the use of chemical treatments. She said Asian honeysuckle is present in virtually every park, with large patches growing in Wolf Run, Honey Run Highlands, and Thayer Ridge parks. Stands of honeysuckle are especially visible along edges of ecosystems — where a field meets a woodland, for example.

The Friends of the Woods volunteer group has not removed invasive honeysuckle in the past, although as more volunteers join in this fight, that might be possible. For now, our goal is to raise awareness and help the public understand that just because a plant looks and smells pretty, that doesn’t mean it is something that benefits the parks or the greater natural environment.



Pictured above is a volunteer removing Honeysuckle at Wolf Run Park in 2015.