



## BEVERLY SHORES

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP  
PROMOTING & PROTECTING ECOLOGICAL HARMONY

# Bush Honeysuckles Pretty and Insidious

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Bush honeysuckles (*Lonicera spp.*) include up to three species and several different horticultural varieties of non-native shrubs that occur throughout woodlands and woodland edges in Beverly Shores. The plants are most distinctive in summer through early winter when their red or orange berries, appearing in pairs along the stem, are ripe. In the springtime they have an asymmetrical, tubular flower most commonly white or yellow and often quite fragrant. Leaves and flowers also appear in pairs along the stems. Bush honeysuckles are among the first shrubs to leaf out in the spring and the last to lose their leaves in the fall.



Asian Bush Honeysuckle

Bush honeysuckles were initially introduced to the United States from Asia as ornamentals in the 1800s. In the 1950s through 1970s, the planting of bush honeysuckles was encouraged by government agencies for wildlife food and cover (a mistake repeated with many plants to be discussed in future articles, including multiflora rose and Russian olive) and to prevent erosion. Ironically, bush honeysuckles are now found to have less nutritional value than native shrub berries. In spite of this, the seeds have been widely disseminated by birds and small mammals and bush honeysuckles are a problem in the management of many natural areas in most of the eastern and Midwestern United States. These honeysuckles spread rapidly and form a dense understory thicket, choking out and preventing the growth of native plants. They also produce a chemical that inhibits the growth of native plants (in a similar fashion to tree of heaven) in their vicinity.

Bush honeysuckles may involve some effort to control. When the plants are small, they can often simply be pulled out of the ground by the roots. But larger shrubs may need to be treated with an herbicide containing glyphosate, like "Roundup." Either the whole shrub can be sprayed on the foliage or the bush can be cut to the ground and the stumps treated with glyphosate. The latter is the most successful method. In all cases when using herbicides and other pesticides, be sure to follow the label directions carefully. When disposing of plants with fruit on them, place them in garbage bags with the rest of your garbage to prevent the seeds from spreading further. .

Berries were still visible this December so you may be able to walk your property and look for shrubs with paired, red or orange berries and some still clinging, paired leaves. Because there are many native shrubs and small trees with fruit and berries, if you need help to identify bush honeysuckles on your property, the Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be happy to help identify the plant for you.

## **Native Plant Alternatives**

Bush honeysuckles are an aggressive invader that crowd out desirable native species. But they were introduced for a reason. They are easy to grow, grow rapidly, and re-sprout after removal. They have flowers and berries that are attractive to birds and butterflies. Fortunately, however, a number of native species grow well in the dunes and provide similar or greater benefits for wildlife



Spicebush with berries

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a good native alternative to bush honeysuckles. Spicebush is common in Beverly Shores, particularly in the woodlands on either side of Kemil (East State Park) Road. You will also find abundant spicebush alongside most trails in the Indiana Dunes State Park. It has small fragrant yellow flowers in the spring, bright red, spicy smelling berries (used for seasoning by European settlers) in late summer and bright yellow leaves in the autumn. The shrub tolerates part shade quite well and obviously, from its local abundance, is well adapted to our dunes habitat. The only requirement for obtaining those beautiful berries is to grow both male and female plants, as spicebush shrubs have two sexes (Some species of plants feature both sexes on the same individual and some on separate individuals).



Spicebush Swallowtail

The berries are a good food source for many birds, and spicebush swallowtail caterpillars feed on the leaves. The beautiful spicebush swallowtail butterfly (pictured right) is quite common and likely graces all of our yards in the summer. Spicebush is available from a number of mail order nurseries.



Winterberry at Four Corners

Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is another shrub with beautiful red berries. These berries grow in clusters close along the twig stems. As a matter of fact, the stems are so showy that they are often sold for Christmas decorations. In Beverly Shores, winterberry, a native species of holly that does not retain its leaves in the winter, is easily located in the fall along Beverly Drive growing close to the water by its brilliant red berries. Though it is found in the wild in wetlands, it does not require wet feet to grow as an ornamental. It does, however, like spicebush, come in male and female plants and needs at least one male per 12 female plants to produce berries.

The American black elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) is another Beverly Shores resident, abundant along our roadsides, especially in wet areas, with its white umbrella like clusters of flowers in early summer and its deep purple berries, very popular with birds, later in the season. The leaves, unlike spicebush and winterberry, are "compound" and therefore have multiple leaves arranged around a single stem.





Black Elderberry flowers

This plant is very easy to grow and does not require multiple plants to produce berries. Its cousin, red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*) is less common, growing more often in woodlands. It is more shade tolerant and produces flowers and berries in more of a cluster than an umbrella and the fruit is bright red. Elderberry fruits, besides for being very attractive to birds and pollinating insects, can make delicious jams, pies and even wine. Though the fruit of elderberries is edible, it must be cooked before consumption because it is slightly toxic when raw (so slightly toxic that I have picked fruit off the shrub and eaten it fresh on many occasions before researching for this article). Elderberry flowers are also used both for their flavor (at a Swedish restaurant recently I was offered elderflower infused aquavit) and medicinal properties.

A native shrub that does not produce showy fruit but does have beautiful, bright red fall foliage is the highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*). A nursery dealer says that it "provides four seasons of fanfare, starting with twisted, peeling stems in winter; profuse white or pink blossoms in spring; savory blue fruit in summer; and long-lasting foliage the color of a rich red wine in fall." Though this may overstate its charms a little, it can be a very handsome plant with outstanding autumn color. It is also the same blueberry used for cultivation of fruit, though in many different hybrid forms, so one could attempt a harvest. If fruit is your motivation for planting, however, keep in mind that male and female plants are needed and you will have competition with wildlife in gathering ripe fruit.



Highbush Cranberry

"Highbush" is a popular name for shrubs. Highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*), not actually a "cranberry" as you can tell by the scientific name but rather a viburnum, is a popular and easy to grow native shrub. This plant is called "cranberry" because of its bright red berries, born in umbrella like clusters. The berries are edible and rich in vitamin C though quite tart so you might prefer to leave them for birds and other wildlife who won't feel the need to add sugar. These berries are preceded by an umbrella-like arrangement of white flowers, with inconspicuous fertile flowers in the center surrounded by sterile and showy white flowers. The leaves are opposite each other on the stem, resemble a maple leaf and have a nice red fall color. The spring azure, one of those tiny, blue butterflies you might sometimes catch a glimpse of, uses viburnum and blueberries for its host plant. Be careful though when shopping to avoid European highbush cranberry (*Viburnum opulus*), also frequently planted and available from nurseries. European highbush cranberry is an invasive in many parts of North America, including northwest Indiana. If you see something like a highbush cranberry growing around Beverly Shores, it is more likely to be the European species.

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