

## What's That Shrub with the Red Berries?

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I've been noticing a lot of shrubs showing up in many locations that are covered with small bright red berries (the size of a pea or smaller) and often still holding a few somewhat green leaves. These bushes may be in a yard, on the side of the road, or in a wooded area. They seem rather attractive and people occasionally ask me what they are because they want to plant one in their yard. This species is likely one of several closely related non-native species that we simply call bush honeysuckle and I really don't want you to plant it. In fact if you have them in your yard, I wish you would cut them down.

Most of these species of honeysuckle came to the United States from various locations in Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While they have had a few redeeming qualities, the flowers in the spring are quite fragrant, they have become quite a liability. The small red fruit can become quite attractive to wildlife, birds especially, who will consume them and then deposit the seeds everywhere they stop and lift their tail. The plant grows quite aggressively and survives quite well in the low light conditions of woodland understory and therein lies the real problem with this plant.

Once the plant gets started in woodland areas it just keeps getting denser and denser with new seedlings coming up around the plant in addition to new seedlings from bird deposited seeds. Bush honeysuckle tends to leaf out earlier than most other woodland plants and it also holds its leaves longer than other woodland plants. This means that it shades out the ground around it very early as well as late into the season. This shading reduces light to other native woody plants trying to become established either killing them or simply preventing them from getting established at all. In areas from here east bush honeysuckle has totally taken over the forest floor preventing any other small plants from growing and interrupting the normal progression of native trees establishing to take over when the older trees start to decline.

While bush honeysuckle will grow fine in full sun and will even move into pastures, regular burning seems to be a deterrent to it preventing it from getting established in pastures that are burned periodically. Even when fires are allowed to run into woodlands we have seen suppression of the plant and at least partial control. But we still have way too much of this stuff growing and the only way to stop it is to start removing it, thereby reducing how many berries there are for the birds to eat. But don't worry, there are plenty of other foods for the birds.

Earlier in the fall, after most plants have dropped their leaves, foliar applications of glyphosate can be used quite effectively. With most other plants having shed their leaves you can really target just the bush honeysuckle. We've had enough cold weather now that foliar treatments are out of the question and if you have these growing in your yard I would not recommend it. You can grub the bush out by hand but that is a lot of work. Like most deciduous woody plants simply cutting it off at ground level won't kill it. You need to treat the stump with a herbicide. Probably the best herbicide choice is concentrated glyphosate. Glyphosate comes in many trade names and concentrations but make sure that you are using a product with at least 20% glyphosate. Apply it full strength with a small brush directly on the freshly cut stump. There are other products out there but many of these could seep into the soil or produce fumes, even now, damaging desirable plants. Glyphosate avoids most of these issues!