

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Japanese honeysuckle

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Japanese honeysuckle – for many, those yellow and white blooms are as indicative of summer as fireflies, watermelon, and baseball. All of us probably have memories of plucking the flowers and pulling the pistil through the flower's base to capture that drop of nectar.

However, this plant wasn't always emblematic of summer in the South. As its name implies, it's not from around here. Japanese honeysuckle was introduced to the United States in the early to mid-1800s as an ornamental, for erosion control, and for wildlife forage.

Japanese honeysuckle is able to thrive in a variety of environments, from fields to forests to wetlands.

The plant grows long runners that can drop down roots wherever the stem touches soil. Seeds are spread by animals that readily eat its fruit. Its aggressive growth makes it a threat to native communities, where its vines can girdle woody plants and overtop and shade out plants. I was speaking recently with a biologist who, on a visit to the Sandy Mush area west of Asheville, came across a tree toppled by the sheer mass of honeysuckle vines growing on it.

The beautiful thing is for home landscaping, there are native alternatives – coral honeysuckle, with its large red flowers that provide nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies, and fruits that feed a variety of bird. Trumpet creeper is another alternative, which provides food for ruby-throated hummingbirds.

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