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How to Grow a Honeysuckle Shrub



Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)

Photo Credit: Charles Collard/Shutterstock

Botanical Name: *Lonicera* spp.

Plant Type: Shrubs and Bushes

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Planting, Growing, and Pruning Honeysuckles

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

Last Updated: May 9, 2024



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Few plants are as beloved by our polli-
nators as honeysuckle. Vining and

perennial, it will provide your garden with years of color and hummingbird habitat. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for honeysuckle.

About Honeysuckle Vines and Shrubs

ADVERTISEMENT

Honeysuckles belong to the genus *Lonicera* and are native to North America, Europe, and Asia, with about 180 identified species. They are characterized by long, trumpet-shaped flowers in bright red, yellow, and orange colors, most with yellow centers. However, some cultivars have whitish or cream-colored flowers.

Blooms are in clusters of 2 or more flowers at the end of the stem. Some are fragrant, while others are nearly scentless.

Honeysuckles can be shrubby or climbing and vining and are easily trained to climb up a trellis or other support. You may hear them called “woodbine” as well.

They’re often planted to cover unsightly walls and create privacy screens and beautiful flowered arbors. A patio with a pergola can be shaded by a honeysuckle, making it an excellent spot for an afternoon nap. They can also be left to trail along the ground.

Habitat for Pollinators

Some non-natives, like Japanese honeysuckle (*L. japonica*), are aggressive and invasive. However, native honeysuckles are an essential food source for many Lepidoptera species.

In addition to providing nectar and pollen, the plants are critical larval hosts for species like the [snowberry clearwing moth](#), which mimics the look

of a giant bumblebee.

Honeysuckles make fruit in the fall.

Their berries are valued as food by songbirds and small mammals.

Avoid the Invasives

In some regions of North America, invasive honeysuckles have become a considerable problem. They can choke out native trees and cover large patches of land with nearly impenetrable ground cover. Their spread is aided by the birds who feast on the fruit and then drop the seeds in new locations.

To avoid unintentionally causing an infestation, **avoid** planting these commonly available species:

- Japanese honeysuckle –
Lonicera japonica
- Morrow's honeysuckle –
Lonicera morrowii
- Amur honeysuckle –
Lonicera maackii
- Bell's honeysuckle – *Lonicera x bella*

Several other *Lonicera* sp. are also considered invasive based on your location. Search online for “*Lonicera* + invasive species + your state’s name.” Here is an example of a site found with an [invasive honeysuckle search for Vermont](#). Your state likely maintains a list to help people avoid inadvertently planting and spreading invasives.

Read Next

- [What IS a Hummingbird Moth? 8 Fascinating Facts](#)
- [How to Grow Mock Orange: The Complete Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Milkweed: The Complete Plant Guide](#)

PLANTING

Honeysuckle is planted much like other perennial shrubs. Full or partial sunshine, some fertile soil, and mulch are the keys to remember when planting this vine.

When to Plant Honeysuckle

You can't go wrong with planting honeysuckle in spring or early summer. Doing so will offer maximum time for your new plant to root and settle before the cold weather arrives. However, fall planting can also work, depending on your location and the variety you choose.

If you garden in an area where the ground freezes, plant your honeysuckles at least six weeks before the frost.



How to Plant Honeysuckle

Select a location with adequate drainage. Honeysuckle appreciates moist soil but not soggy conditions. If your soil is heavy, poorly draining clay,

consider making a large raised berm to plant your honeysuckle in.

- Dig a hole twice as wide as the rootball and the same depth. The hole should resemble a shallow bowl, not a coffee cup.
- When setting the plant in the hole, the crown should be at the same height in the soil level as it was in the nursery pot. Don't bury it several inches deep like a tomato.
- Work some compost into the soil and plant your honeysuckle. If the roots are heavily circled or overgrown, you may need to loosen them first. Use a handheld garden tool to cut any girdling roots and loosen up the root ball.
- Set your honeysuckle in the hole and begin backfilling with the soil you removed. Be sure to firm the soil to eliminate air pockets around the roots.
- Make a shallow ring around the plant with the leftover soil to help the water infiltrate into the root

zone and not run off. Water your new plant well.

- Mulch around the base, but don't mound the mulch around the stem. Mulch touching the stem can sometimes lead to rot and disease. [Read more about using mulch.](#)

GROWING

Honeysuckle will grow in both full sun and light shade. You'll get more blooms if you plant in a location with six hours per day of sunshine, however. Many honeysuckles are hardy in [USDA zones 4-9](#), but check the cultivar you intend to plant to be sure.

- If you intend for your honeysuckle to climb a fence, arbor, or other support, give it a hand. Use some biodegradable twine and loosely tie the vine to its support. Use a loop about the size of a golf ball. When the vine gets large, it will have attached to the structure indepen-

dently, and the string

will decompose.

- Many *Lonicera* spp. prefer to have their roots shaded, but the vines enjoy the sunshine. Mulch at the base of your vines if they are climbing a trellis or arbor.
- You can also plant low-growing ground cover plants around the base or tuck the vine behind another shrub to shade your honeysuckle's roots.



- Provide water weekly when newly planted. After the first growing season, honeysuckle should only need to be watered during prolonged dry periods.
- Fertilize if desired in spring with a slow-release general-

purpose fertilizer.

Types

- **Coral honeysuckle** (*L. semper-virens*) is a native species. Its large, 10-20 foot long vines are perfect to create a climbing and flowering display.
- **'Major Wheeler'** (*L. semper-virens*) has a long blooming period and gorgeous red flowers with yellow-orange centers.
- **American honeysuckle** (*Lonicera canadensis*) is a shrub-formed bush honeysuckle with pale, cream-colored flowers native to the New England area.
- **Goldflame Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera x heckrottii*) is a fragrant bloomer that makes a stunning display of purple, pink, and yellow on a trellis or arbor.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

Powdery mildew, aphids, scale insects,
and caterpillars.

WIT AND WISDOM

- “Meanwhile, spring came, and with it the outpourings of Nature. The hills were soon splashed with wild flowers; the grass became an altogether new and richer shade of green; and the air became scented

*with fresh and surprising smells — of
jasmine, honeysuckle, and lavender.”*

— Dalai Lama XIV, Freedom in
Exile: The Autobiography of the
Dalai Lama

- In the language of flowers, honey-
suckle means “bonds of love.” [Learn
more about what flowers mean.](#)
- The honeysuckle is one of [June’s
birth flowers](#), along with the rose.

SHRUBS AND TREES

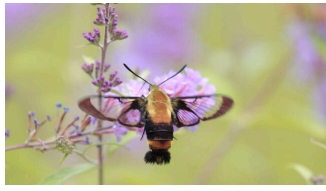
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer
and master gardener with a
passion for soil health, small
producers, forestry, and horti-
culture. [Read More from Andy
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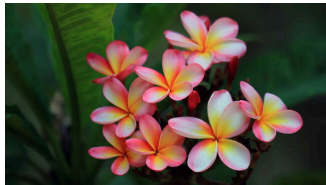
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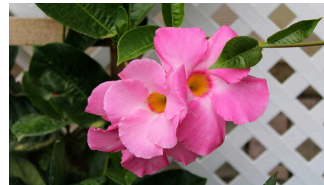
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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Wendy Coltas (not verified) 9 months ago

I will soon be planting a coral honeysuckle, zone 4, with ESE exposure. I have heard it can be trained to climb a tree. How should I do this on a tall maple?

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REPLY

Mary Colwell (not verified) 9 months 1 week ago

Hi Andy, thanks for warning readers about the invasive honeysuckle species.

REPLY

Malissa (not verified) 11 months 4 weeks ago

A question, not a comments. If I put a honeysuckle vine into a pot, how long (approximately) will it take to develop a thicker, bush like trunk? I want a Major Wheeler, but not taking over the neighborhood. Thank you.

REPLY

Elaine Leporati (not verified) 1 year ago

I have a honeysuckle vine that I've trained up a brick wall. Do I need to prune it back to stimulate flowers? This is its second season.

REPLY**The Editors** 1 year ago

Hi Elaine,

You do want to prune your honeysuckle vine, and not necessarily to stimulate flower growth, but to keep it from becoming a thick, entangled mess, which can limit the flower production because your vine is not able to get the proper sunlight and air flow it needs.

Depending on when your vine flowers, you can prune it immediately after flowering for both shape and to keep it tidy. Thinning stems and branches (and removing dead or diseased portions) will help promote new growth. Most early flowering honeysuckle vine flowers on the previous year's growth so it is important to prune as soon after flowering as possible

to avoid impacting the following
year's flowers.

If your vine eventually gets out of
control, you can do a hard prune
during the dormant season—just
remember that will mean you will
not get any flowers in the
coming year.

REPLY

Suzann Attig (not verified) 1 year 5
months ago

I have mature orange very tall honeysuckle.
It is dying. No flowers or leaves. We had
bleach put in our well water for watering
the yard. Watered every night. Could this
kill honeysuckle?

REPLY

The Editors 1 year 5 months ago
Hi Suzann,

Sorry to hear about your honeysuckle. Bleach can be very harmful to plants and could very well be the reason that your honeysuckle is suffering.

There are also other factors that can lead to a honeysuckle's decline. You mentioned that you watered every night, but well established honeysuckle plants actually prefer to dry out between waterings and do not like very damp conditions. Too much water will create issues for your plant. Overfertilizing can also prevent a honeysuckle from setting flowers.

REPLY

Linda (not verified) 1 year 10 months ago

I live in Toronto, Ontario & am fortunate to have had success at growing a Japonica honeysuckle vine for the past 3 years in a container on my condo balcony, west facing, direct sun from 1:00 to 7:00 pm. It

started off very healthy this spring, leaves appearing daily, but more recently, the leaves shaded by the newer growth underneath, are turning yellow, then drying to brown & falling off. Bc of facing west, and the fact leaves are brown & drying, I water daily. But am I watering too much?? How do I know?? Your advice is appreciated.

REPLY

Audrey (not verified) 2 years 3 months ago

I have a honey suckle, can I take a branch off (put in water until I get roots) to plant another one? Would the branch be one with the flowers?

REPLY

The Editors 2 years 3 months ago

Yes! Honeysuckle is one of the easiest bushes to propagate through cuttings. Wait until early

spring flowers has tapered off. Then—or anytime thereafter until, say, midsummer—the plant will make vigorous non-flowering branches appropriate for soft-wood cuttings; there should be no sign of floral buds. With a sharp knife, sever a stem just below a pair of leaves, yielding a tip cutting 3 to 6 inches long. The lowest one or two pairs of leaves should be removed. Honeysuckle grows so vigorously that application of rooting hormones is optional. The cut end of the stem should then be inserted about one inch deep into a container with rooting media such as natural clean sand, coconut coir, and horticultural products like perlite, vermiculite, and rock wool—anything that holds water to keep plant hydrated but is loose enough to get air to the roots (versus compacted). Once the cuttings have been inserted into the rooting medium, they just need time,

moderately humid air, and moderately bright light in order to establish their new roots.

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