

hardy *Honey Suckle* varieties

for north dakota

By Donald G. Hoag¹

THE honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.) make up one of the larger and more confusing genera of woody plants found in the nurseryman's lists. A diligent search of the commercial listings would reveal about 100 species and varieties of honeysuckle offered in the trade. Only a relatively small number of these species and varieties has real horticultural value.

Considerable confusion exists among the scientific names of the honeysuckle varieties and species. Early hybridizers have introduced a wealth of hybrid varieties with Latinized or "species-sounding" names. Many of these apparent species have been offered in trade with no mention of their parentage and without the benefit of accepted common names.

Numerous true species as well as hybrids are represented by two or more (in some cases six or more) strains or clonal varieties, differing only slightly from the type of the species. To add to the confusion, an occasional hybrid "species" may have a name identical with that of a variety or clone, e.g., the Willow-leaf Honeysuckle, a hybrid between *Lonicera ruprechtiana* and *L. xylosteoides salicifolia* has long been named *L. salicifolia* in confusion with *L. coerulea salicifolia*, a variety of the Sweetberry Honeysuckle.

Since the legitimacy of either name is questionable and, since many nurserymen have used variety names rather loosely, one who purchases *L. salicifolia* may be in doubt as to which honeysuckle he is buying.

The wealth of honeysuckle species and varieties in trade is not necessarily an indication of the value of the entire genus. The common and easily obtainable Tatarian Honeysuckle (*L. tatarica*) and its numerous varieties is without doubt the most valuable of the shrubby honeysuckles in commerce. Many other species and varieties of honeysuckle are striking in their similarity to Tatarian Honeysuckle and yet when seriously compared suffer from the comparison. Although there may be value to many of the types if established in the home planting, there is little reason to seek them out since most often a variety of *L. tatarica* could serve as well or better and is probably more easily available.

In appraising the genus as a whole, the typical shrubby honeysuckle variety is most often vigorously upright with a branchy habit and a heavy cover of foliage. The flowers are generally pink, white or rose-red, with some of the white-flowered varieties displaying aging flowers with a distinct light yellow

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color. The blooms are generally less than 1 inch in length but may be produced in profusion for a period of a week to 10 days.

The fruit of many honeysuckles is as showy as the bloom; many species produce red, red-orange or scarlet berries, some are black or blue and a few are yellow or yellow-orange. Although the berries are not poisonous, neither are they palatable. Few if any of the honeysuckles display autumn foliage coloration.

Of the honeysuckles tested by the department of horticulture, North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, the Tatarian Honeysuckle was prominent in displaying the more desirable features. Its clean blue-green foliage, its showy blooms and attractive fruit, especially as exhibited by its select varieties, make it a standard against which other species and varieties should be measured.

The varieties, "Cardinal" and "Rosalie" are desirable types and easily available in North Dakota; the former has reddish blooms and the latter pink blooms, while both produce showy red fruit. Although there are possibly dozens of clones of the Tatarian Honeysuckle that have at one time or another been available in commerce, the majority of the stock sold is seed grown and, therefore, extremely variable as to blossom and fruit color. Although many of the named varieties are more valuable in the home yard, the variable seed grown stock may provide interest in the mass planting.

Perhaps second most popular of the honeysuckles is the Morrow Honeysuckle (**L. morrowi**). Morrow Honeysuckle may be considered to be somewhat less vigorous than Tatarian, but as having sufficient hardiness to be of value in the landscape scene. Although its habit is

more spreading or rounded than many of the honeysuckles, its chief attraction lies in its white blooms which age to a soft yellow before dropping. Its red berries are effective in midsummer. The Morrow Honeysuckle is probably no more attractive than a white Tatarian but is of sufficient value to be retained in any recommended variety list.

A group of hybrids between **L. morrowi** and **L. tatarica** has long been referred to in the manner of a species as **L. Bella** or Belle Honeysuckle. Inheriting much that is good from its parents (whose similarities are numerous) it is of value but hardly good enough to replace either parent variety. The Belle Honeysuckle is available in variety with white, pink or rose blooms. Although it has the advantage of being somewhat smaller (6 feet) at maturity than Tatarian Honeysuckle, its value is reduced by being less hardy. In spite of this, Belle Honeysuckle with its parents may easily be considered as the best shrubby honeysuckles for North Dakota.

In recent years many nurseries have advertised and sold a variety popularly referred to as Zabeli Honeysuckle and reputed to have red blooms. The variety **Lonicera korolkowi zabelii** is characterized by bluish to gray-green foliage and has seldom been considered easy to establish. Without a doubt, most, if not all, of what has been distributed in the upper midwest as Zabeli Honeysuckle is a reddish flowered strain of **L. tatarica**. Being a variety of Tatarian, or something very similar, it may be considered a good honeysuckle, but with deep rose blooms, not red!

The Manchurian Honeysuckle (**L. ruprechtiana**) is hardy, vigorous but distinctly less attractive than the foregoing varieties. Its some-

what rounded or spreading habit may be desirable, but its dull orange berries and slightly wrinkled (rugose) foliage has much to be desired. It is, perhaps, one of the varieties which, if already established, might be left but not sought out. The Rurarian Honeysuckle (*L. notha*, a hybrid between *L. ruprechtiana* and *L. tatarica*) has inherited a deeper red berry from the Tatarian Honeysuckle but the dull foliage of the Manchurian parent. It is somewhat better than Manchurian Honeysuckle but distinctly less valuable than Tatarian Honeysuckle.

A hardy species enjoying recent publicity is the Amur Honeysuckle (*L. maacki*). Its chief value is reputed to be in its late maturing berries and its habit of holding foliage late into the fall. When one considers that its habit of growth is very coarse and that the leaves are large, dull and coarse (reminiscent of a very vigorous Mock Orange) it seems immaterial whether the foliage is held late into the season or not. This is one of the least attractive honeysuckle species.

Although the Sweetberry Honeysuckle (*L. coerulea edulis*) is sufficiently hardy for North Dakota, it apparently is not adapted to the growing conditions provided at the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. Growth has been very slow and yellowing of the foliage (chlorosis) has frequently been evident. Flower and fruit production has been very limited. On the basis of this test, Sweetberry Honeysuckle could not be recommended, at least for heavy soils.

The Buckthorn Honeysuckle (*L. orientalis caucasica*) may be elimi-

nated because of its dull pink blooms and black fruits while *L. villosa*, which apparently has no common name, might be discarded because of its light green, very dull foliage, a characteristic definitely inferior to that of the preferred varieties.

The Coralline Honeysuckle (*L. chrysantha villosa*) has displayed a low, compact habit of growth which might be desirable. However, since the specimens have been generally chorotic, it may be that lack of vigor is partly responsible for the habit. The species may grow to 12 feet but the test shrubs have not passed 2 feet in height. Lack of adaptability to our soils is sufficient to eliminate this species.

Clavey's Dwarf Honeysuckle, variously listed as *L. claveyi* and *L. compacta nana* (these species names may be seriously questioned), is perhaps the most interesting of the recent honeysuckle introductions. Although the foliage is dull, slightly wrinkled and somewhat light green in color, the habit is compact and truly dwarf. Four year old Clavey's Honeysuckles are 2 to 2½ feet in height with a nearly equal spread. Although early growth was vigorous, recent growth has been sufficiently slow to indicate that the specimens will likely mature at no more than 3 feet in height. Flowers are pale yellow and small but the fruit is an attractive red. In spite of the fact that the foliage of Clavey's Dwarf Honeysuckle is not comparable with the best honeysuckle foliage, its size and well branched, compact habit make it worth adding to the list of dwarf shrubs.