

## Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*

### What's in a name?

Honeysuckle is also known as woodbine. The latter is Scottish in origin and refers to the spiraling grove it creates when growing up young hazel rods (see photo). These were often cut and made into walking sticks.

The more common name is believed to be Anglo Saxon in origin and is associated with the practice of drinking the tiny amount of sweet nectar from the bottom of the long tubular flowers.

The Latin name for the Italian species (*L. caprifolium*) means 'goat's leaf' and reflects the belief that the leaves were once a favourite food of goats. It may also reflect the shape of the leaves, which resemble goat's ears.



### Botany & Ecology

There are 180 different species of honeysuckle. All are deciduous, wood climbers and found in a variety of woodlands. They entwine around other trees and shrubs always in a clockwise direction up to 6 meters tall, often distorting the growth of the host. Flowering occurs between June and September, growing in clusters and are a creamy yellow colour. Each flower has two lips and a long narrow tube. They are pollinated either by moths (see below) or long tongued bees, sometimes turning orange with a touch of crimson afterwards. The berries form clusters and turn red when ripe in the autumn.

The leaves are oval in shape with a smooth margin and occur in pairs opposite one another. The leaves may be connected to the stem via a stalk or sometimes these may be absent.

White Admiral caterpillars feed exclusively on honeysuckle. Adult White Admiral butterflies can be seen flying along woodland rides between June and August.

The sweet heady evening smell of the flowers can be detected up to half a mile away by a number of moths including the Hummingbird Hawk moth.

Bees value the flowers as they are a good source of nectar and birds like thrushes and bullfinches, eat the ripe berries during the autumn.



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### Folklore

Honeysuckle is associated with love and good fortune. In Scotland, the plant appears in wedding ceremonies and represents the love that clings without harming anyone. In European lore, a honeysuckle blossoming near your home foretells a wedding within one year and the flowers were brought into the home to ensure that the marriage would be a happy one. The Victorians believed that growing honeysuckle near the home or in an arch over the front door would attract love, luck and wealth. It was also believed that this plant would protect the house and garden from negative spirits.

The flowers represent prosperity, and money would follow when they are brought into the home. This belief dates back to the Medieval period and is still practiced in rural East Anglia.



### Folk Medicine

Only the flower was used by early medicinal practitioners as the leaves and berries are toxic to humans. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the flowers were infused with hot water and those suffering migraines, coughs and asthma were encouraged to sit over a bowl with a cloth over their heads and breathe in the smell.

A tea made from the flowers was also prescribed to detoxify the body and eliminate urinary disorders and kidney stones. It was also ingested as an aid to soothe labour pains in women giving birth.

The oil which can be extracted from the bark was often applied to the skin to relieve the swelling from painful insect bites and also to improve the flow of blood and relieve the discomfort associated with rheumatism.

