



Invasive Plant Alert¹

Black Swallow-wort

Cynanchum louiseae Kartesz & Gandhi

Black Swallow-wort is an herbaceous perennial twining vine in the milkweed family. It is of European origin, and was first reported in the U.S. as a problematic weed in the 1850's.



Figure 1 Infestation. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, Univ. of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Where to Look

Black Swallow-wort can be found in upland areas of old fields, abandoned agricultural areas, disturbed areas and in woodlands. Growing in thick patches, it can smother the native vegetation that provides food for grassland birds and insects.

It has been reported as invasive in Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York and Wisconsin. In Vermont, it is out-competing a federally endangered endemic species, Jesup's milkvech. There is also concern that the monarch butterfly could be endangered by mistaking the swallow-wort for its larval milkweed plant.

Identifying the Plant

Black Swallow-wort is a twining perennial vine, growing from 6-8 feet in length. Its leaves are opposite, toothless, oval to

lance-shaped and a shiny dark green. They are 2"-5" long and .5"-2.5" wide. Its dark purple flowers appear in clusters, each with 5 fleshy triangular petals.

It should not be confused with the native Smooth swallowwort (*Cynanchum laeve*) which has white flowers and leaves with a heart shaped base.



Figure 1 Flowers. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, Univ. of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Black Swallow-wort blooms in May and June, with blooms followed by slender, tapered seed pods turning from green to brown as they mature. As the pods open in from late July into October, the seed is disbursed on downy parachutes like milkweed. A thick infestation in full sun can produce 2,000 seeds per square meter. The plant also reproduces via rhizomes.



Figure 3 Seed pods. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, Univ. of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

How to get rid of it?

Management of swallow-wort is

a complex process given its abundant seeds and its ability to clone via rhizomes. Successful control requires repeated monitoring and treatment.



Figure 4. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Conn., Bugwood.org

Hand-pulling can be used if the entire root crown is removed before the plants go to seed. Pod bearing plants should be bagged or burned. Mowing will not eradicate the plant, but can prevent a mature seed crop if done in early to mid-July.

Glyphosate has been effective in eradicating Black Swallow-wort in both foliar and stem applications. Plants should be treated when they are in flower but before the pods form.

Resources

USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Staff, Newtown Square, PA. Weed of the Week: Black Swallow-wort. http://www/ma/fs/fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/black-swallow-wort.pdf

Plant Conservation Alliance Alien Plant Working Group. Alien Plant Invaders of Natural Areas. <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pdf/cylo1.pdf>

¹ This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region