

Night-blooming Cockle

Silene noctiflora L.

Alternate Names

sticky cockle, night-flowering silene, night-flowering catchfly, clammy cockle

Related Species

White cockle

S. pratensis (Rafn)

Godron & Gren.

Bladder campion

S. vulgaris (Moench) Garcke

Description

Night-blooming cockle is an annual plant that is hairy throughout with sticky hairs on the upper stems. One to 3 woody stems rise up to 3 feet high from the root. Stem nodes are swollen where the leaves attach. Leaves are opposite and covered with sticky hairs. Basal leaves are stalked, oblong, and 1½–5 inches long. Stem leaves are stalkless, ¾–3¼ inches long, and up to 1½ inches wide. Ascending the plant, leaves become reduced in size and may be alternate near the top of the stem.

Flowers are fragrant and occur in terminal clusters of 3 to 8 that open at night. The calyx has 10 prominent, dark green veins and is sticky-haired and about ⅝ of an inch long when the flowers are open. The 5 deeply notched petals, ¾–1¾ inches long, are white to pink. There are 10 stamens and 3 styles. The fruit is a capsule with 3 compartments, each containing up to 185 seeds, and 10 distinct green veins.



Night-blooming cockle.

Photo by British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries

Family: Caryophyllaceae

Night-blooming Cockle

Similar Species

A number of native *Silene* species and two other exotic species occur in Alaska. Exotic white cockle (*S. pratensis* (Rafn) Godron & Gren.) is often confused with night-blooming cockle but can be distinguished by the presence of separate male and female plants. Bladder campion (*S. vulgaris* (Moench) Garcke) is another exotic species similar to night-blooming cockle, but it has flowers in branched clusters of 5 to 30 and a calyx with pinkish-white veins. Unlike any other *Silene* species in Alaska, bladder campion is hairless.



USDA Forest Service photo by Elizabeth Bella

Night-blooming cockle.

Management

Stubble burning and early plowing of grain-fields has been shown to cause a decline in the numbers of night-blooming cockle (Perring 1974). Both it and bladder campion have been shown to be resistant to certain herbicides and susceptible to others (McNeil 1980, Stewart 1969).

Notes

Night-blooming cockle was initially reported in North America in Ontario, Canada in 1862 and spread to the Canadian prairies by 1883. It is often an impurity in clover and forage seed. *Silene* probably comes from the Greek word “sialon,” referring to a gummy substance on the stems, or from Silenus, the intoxicated foster-father of Bacchus, god of wine, who was often covered with foam, like the glandular secretions of many species of this genus.



X1D Services photo by Dan Tenaglia

Bladder campion.