Invasive Plant Alert[1]

Pale Swallow-Wort

Cynanchum rossicum (Kleopow) Borhidi

Also known as European Swallow-wort or dog-strangling vine, *Cynanchum rossicum* is a growing threat in the East. It can establish dense stands that can smother native species.

Where to Look

Pale Swallow-Wort has been found in forest understory, pastures, old fields, shores, flood plains and disturbed areas but is typically associated with upland calcareous soils. It can tolerate a wide range of moisture and light conditions. Extensive populations have been linked to reductions in invertebrate and vertebrate biodiversity.

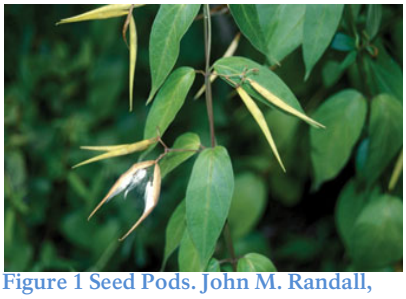

Figure 1 Seed Pods. John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org

This species is native to southwestern European Russia. It has been found from Maine to Maryland and scattered into the Great Lakes and Midwest.

Identifying the Plant

Pale Swallow-Wort is a perennial herbaceous twining vine that spreads by wind dispersed seed. It has a clear, watery sap. The leaves are paired, dark green, shiny, with non-toothed margins. They can be oval to elliptic with a pointed tip and 2-5 inches long with 2-8 inch long petioles. The leaf margins and major veins underneath are pubescent.

Figure 2 John M. Randall, The Nature Conservancy, Bugwood.org

The unopened flower buds are ovoid to cone shaped with a pointed apex. They are produced in small, branched clusters of 5-20 buds in the axils of leaves. Flowers are about 0.25 inches across and petals are pink or red-brown to maroon. Fruits are smooth, hairless seed pods 1-3 inches long. The pods turn from green to light brown as they mature and split open to release seeds. Seeds are small, brown, and curved with a tiny silky marginal wing.

Figure 3 Leaves. Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

Pale Swallow-Wort looks similar to the native honeyvine (*C. leave*) that can be distinguished because of its heart shaped leaves and white flowers. It is also similar to black swallow-wort (*C. louiseae*), another invasive, but with small, star-shaped purple to black flowers covered with white hairs.

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

How to get rid of it?

Control is difficult. Plants can be pulled by hand, mowed, or dug up removing the roots. However, herbicide treatment is much more effective because it kills the entire plant, including the roots. No biological controls have been found for this plant.

Resources

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, 4th ed. (2010). http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/cyro.htm

USDA Study Targets Invasive "Dog-Strangling Vines" http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/pr/2006/060627.htm

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

2012 National Park Service, National Capital Region Exotic Plant Management Team, Washington, DC.
Written by Martha Jenkins, edited by Mark Frey