



MAINE INVASIVE PLANTS

Black Swallowwort

Cynanchum louiseae
(Milkweed Family)

Threats to Native Habitats

Black swallowwort is particularly troublesome in open areas and along edges and banks where it grows over other vegetation, blocking light and creating tangled thickets. It alters and degrades natural habitat by crowding out native plants and is a threat to rare species in some locations in New England.

Description

Black swallowwort is a perennial vine with a single non-branching stem that grows up to six feet in length. The vines typically twine and sprawl over other vegetation and die back to the ground each year. The dark green leaves are opposite on the stem and are lanceolate (shaped like a lance head) to heart-shaped. Flowers are purplish-brownish, approximately one-quarter-inch wide, five-petaled, and fragrant. They appear in June and may be found until late summer, particularly on plants growing in the shade. Fruits are long slender green pods (two to three inches), that turn dark brown when ripe. They appear in pairs or sometimes threes, similar to milkweed pods, but longer and narrower. Seeds are also like common milkweed seeds, rounded and flattened, each with an attached tuft of silky hair. Seeds are dispersed by wind. Reproduction is primarily by seed, although plants may spread by trailing, rooting (stoloniferous) stems, creating large colonies. In winter, stems may be found entangled in small shrubs with remnants of old seedpods still attached.

Habitat

Dense populations occur in open, disturbed places such as areas along roads and railroad tracks, and also along woodland edges and in open woods. This vine typically grows in soils that are moist but not saturated. Prolific growth has been observed in open to partially shaded areas with alkaline soils;



Black swallowwort (photo by John A. Lynch, courtesy of the New England Wild Flower Society)

this could indicate an adaptation to certain soil and sun conditions.

Distribution

Black swallowwort is a native of southwestern Europe and was most likely introduced to North America around 1900. The Josselyn Botanical Society has reported its appearance in four Maine counties: Cumberland, Lincoln, Sagadahoc and York. Nationally it has been reported from Maine to Michigan to Nebraska as well as California.

Control

Mechanical Control: Digging up the root crowns is effective but relatively destructive and the whole crown must be removed. Pulling the plants by hand

generally leads to resprouting but can prevent seed production, especially if repeated during the growing season. A less effective method is pod picking, which also limits seed production, but does little damage to the existing population. Mowing is best for preventing seed production. Mow frequently (one to two visits per season) just as the pods are beginning to form.

Chemical Control: Apply a one-percent solution of a triclopyr-based herbicide at an application rate of 2.25–19 L/ha (one to eight quarts per acre). The use of a triclopyr-based herbicide is especially desirable in grassy areas. Repeated herbicide applications will most likely be necessary in vigorous stands. It is best to spray early in the season before viable seeds are produced (before mid-July). Cut-stem applications are recommended for small infestations or if nearby desirable vegetation will be adversely affected. Burning and grazing do not appear to be effective. Use herbicides responsibly and follow manufacturer's directions. Contact the Maine Department of Agriculture for information on restrictions that apply to the use of herbicides. Consult a licensed herbicide applicator before applying herbicides over large areas.



This fact sheet was researched and written by Kyle Fletcher, a student in the Plant and Soil

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For more information or for a more extensive list of references on invasive species contact:

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