

Invasive Plant Species in Chester, CT

Common Name: Black Swallow-wort

Scientific Name: *Cynanchum louiseae*

Origin: Europe

General Information: Black Swallow-wort has become another major invasive species in Connecticut. It was introduced to the United States in the 1800s from Europe. However, Black Swallow-wort was never highly rated as a horticultural specimen - it's not even an attractive plant.

Swallow-wort is challenging to control and very hardy. It grows readily in both full sun and shade, forming dense mats that crowd out native plants. The stands can eventually cover acres of land if not controlled. Spread occurs by both seeds and rhizomes.

According to some research, Monarch butterflies often mistake Black Swallow-wort for native milkweed. They lay their eggs on the plants and the larvae experience a high rate of mortality from eating the leaves.

Identification

Herbaceous perennial vine: can grow up to 7 feet in length in dense monocultures or interspersed with other vegetation. Plants die back to the ground each year.



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Leaves: dark, glossy green, oval to heart shaped with a pointy tip that occur in pairs along the stem.

Flowers: small star-shaped, dark purple with 5 petals found in clusters of 6-10 blooms. Closely related pale swallow-wort (*Cynanchum rossicum*) has pale pink flowers.



Seed pods: resemble milkweed; flat brown seeds are covered with fluffy white hairs.

Control: Individual plants can be dug up and destroyed but the many fleshy roots must be thoroughly removed or the plant just re-sprouts. Digging out is best done between April and June. As soon as an area has been cleared by digging out the plants, it must be quickly replanted with native plants to reduce the chance of re-sprouting. Pulling out the plants is not effective as they break off easily at the ground and the roots quickly re-sprout within days.

Mowing a lawn or field where there is an established mat of plants will not kill the plants, but will at least limit their growth and seed production. This is best done in June before seed pods form. Speaking of seed pods, one can pick and destroy seed pods before they open to limit the plants' spread.

As a very last resort, glyphosate or trichlopyr can be applied to the foliage at flowering time (early June). Repeated applications may be necessary to achieve good control. Always use caution with herbicides for safety and to avoid killing pollinators.

Black Swallow-wort, which resembles native Milkweed, is difficult to control and causes issues for our Monarch Butterflies. Please be on the lookout for this invasive plant and try to reduce its presence in Connecticut.

References:

<https://ct.botanical-society.org/plants>
<https://fs.fed.us/wildflowers/invasives>