

Black & Pale swallow-wort

Cynanchum louiseae & *C. rosicum*

Fact Sheet

NH Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food, Division of Plant Industry, 29 Hazen Dr, Concord, NH 03301
(603) 271-3488

Common Name: Black & Pale Swallow-wort

Latin Name: *Cynanchum* spp.

New Hampshire Invasive Species Status: Prohibited (Agr 3800)

Native to: Eurasia

Black swallow-wort

Cynanchum louiseae (Previously: *Cynanchum nigrum*)



Leaves w/ seed pod (late summer)



Black swallow-wort - Rye, NH



Flowers (summer)



Seeds w/ tufts (fall)



Seed pods (late summer)



Fall leaf color (autumn)

Description: Perennial herbaceous vine growing to 6'. **Leaves:** Opposite, lanceolate to ovate, dark glossy green, simple, 2-4" long. **Flowers:** Small 1/4", 5-petaled, purplish, from June to September. **Seed:** Seeds are similar to those of milkweed. **Zone:** 4 to 8. **Habitat:** Prefers full to partial sun. **Spread:** Seeds dispersed by wind. **Comments:** Invades roadsides, fields, disturbed sites, meadows, and woodlands, outcompeting native species. **Controls:** Hand pull young plants. Remove and destroy seed pods before they open. Apply herbicides as a foliar spray during the growing season. If plants are to be dug, use a spade and make sure that all root fragments are removed.

Pale swallow-wort

Cynanchum rosicum



Leaves and seed pods (summer)



Flowers (summer)



Foliage (late fall)

Description: Perennial vine growing to 3-6'. Very similar to black swallow-wort with the exception of the flowers. **Leaves:** Opposite, lanceolate, 2-4" long. **Flowers:** Magenta, 3/8", flowering from June to September. **Seed:** Seeds are similar to milkweed. **Zone:** 4 to 8. **Habitat:** It prefers full to partial sun. **Spread:** Seeds dispersed by wind. **Comments:** Invades roadsides, fields, disturbed sites, meadows and woodlands. **Controls:** Hand pull young plants. Remove and destroy seed pods before they open. Apply herbicides as a foliar spray. Dig using a spade to ensure all root fragments are removed.

General Considerations

Both black and pale swallow-wort plants are perennial herbaceous/somewhat woody vines that exhibit very similar characteristics. When mature they can reach heights of 6.5' (2 m) and readily twine around any type of support and usually form dense monotypic stands. Both will exude a milky white sap when broken. The leaves of both black and pale swallow-worts are opposite. Black swallow-wort leaves are oblong to ovate, while Pale swallow-wort leaves are ovate to lanceolate.

Flowers are borne on axillary cymes having branched clusters having six to ten, 5-pointed, star-shaped flowers. Black swallow-wort flowers are dark purple and covered with fine, white hairs. Pale swallow-wort flowers are maroon to pale pink; its petals are twice as long as wide and hairless. Both bloom June-July.

The fruits are small, slender pods (follicles), 2 to 3 inches (4-7 cm) long, which contain many seeds. The fruits are often borne in pairs and split open lengthwise to release seeds. The seeds of swallow-worts have a fine feather tuft of hairs that enables them to be easily dispersed by the wind. Most seeds tend to drop within a few feet of the mother plant and don't move long distances. The extent of travel is related to the seeds weight. Swallow-worts can regenerate vegetatively from an intact or fragmented root crown and from buds on lower stem nodes.

In addition to swallow-wort creating dense monocultures and displacing native vegetation, their leaves and stem tissue contain chemicals that are toxic to moths and butterfly larvae that feed on them. The main concern is that Monarch butterflies rely on common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), but can be confused and lay their eggs on swallow-wort and so they won't survive.

Control Options

See the following control guides: [Control of Invasive Species by Numbers](#)

<i>Black swallow-wort</i> <i>Cynanchum louiseae</i>	
Plant Type	Herbaceous - Perennial liana
Habitat Type	Forests, fields, waste places, roads
USDA Hardiness Zone	4-8
Rooting Structure	Rhizomes
Environmental Impacts	Allelopathic. Both swallow-worts have been found to have high levels of cytotoxic chemicals in their roots, stems, and leaves. Found to displace Jessup's milk vetch.
Wildlife Impacts	Kills butterfly larvae.
Leaf arrangement	Opposite
NWI Ranking	UPL
Soil Type	Sand, loam or clay-based soils
Soil pH Range	4.7 to 8
Light Requirements	Prefers full sun, but grows in light shade.
Growing Season	Early spring through late summer
Growth Rate	
Mature Height	6.5' (2m)
Life Span	70-years
Reproductive Age	1 year
Flowering Period	June - July
Flower Type	?
Pollination	Self pollinating
Seed Set	July to early August
Seed Per Plant	?
Scarification Required	No
Cold Stratification	No
Seed Longevity	<5 years
Seed Germination Rate	49%
Seedling Density	35,000/m ²
Other Propagules	Root fragments
Dispersal Vectors	Wind

Sources

Mehrhoff, L., 2001. Invasive Plant Atlas of New England, Catalog of Species, *Alliaria petiolata*: http://www.eddmaps.org/ipane/ipanespecies/herbs/Cynanchum_louiseae.htm

USDA Forest Service invasive species website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/plants/vine/cynspp/all.html>

Invasives.org: <http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3398>