

BLACK SWALLOW-WORT

(CYNANCHUM LOUISEAE)

2019 Status in Maine:

Localized. Severely Invasive perennial, herbaceous, twining vine. Originates in Europe.

Identify

Leaves: Opposite, broad at the base then taper to a point (heart-shaped). Dark green and turn yellow in fall.

Flowers: Small 5-pointed star-shaped flowers. Dark purple to brown in color. Blooms May-September.

Fruit: Produces long green seed pods that release brown seeds with silky white parachutes (similar to milkweed).

Location

Prefers sun but can grow in shade. Able to grow in low nutrient soils but does not tolerate wet soils. Can be found in fields, roadsides, forest edges, and fragmented forests.

Parks of concern: Hinckley Park, Willard Beach, Greenbelt.

Problem

Black swallow-wort can grow over vegetation and block light. Leaves and roots are toxic to consume and have been shown to kill Monarch butterfly larvae who confuse the plant for milkweed. Roots have also been shown to change soil composition, reducing success of native plants.

How it spreads: Seeds can be carried by wind or in animal fur. Can also spread from plant fragments.

Management

Small populations can be pulled when the soil is moist before seed pods develop. Mowing may encourage re-sprouting but if done several times before production of seed pods it prevent seed production. Care should be taken to dry or burn all plant parts before disposal.

