Black Swallow-wort  Vine
*Cynanchum louiseae*

Vine with single non-branching stem, up to 6’ long. Twines & sprawls over other vegetation, & dies back to ground each year. Often found in moist but not saturated soils.

**Where found:** Open areas, roadsides, open woods, wet meadows.

Leaves opposite on stem, dark green, shiny, lance- or heart-shaped, smooth-edged, 2 – 5” long.

Stems green, thin.

Flowers purplish-brown, with 5 petals, fragrant, ¼” wide, June through September (particularly on plants growing in shade).

Fruits slender green pods, 1.5 – 3” long, that ripen to dark brown.
Seeds brown with hairy tuft at end.
Pods often remain on stems into autumn.


[Sources: Maine Invasive Plants, bulletin #2523; Invasive Plant Atlas of New England]
**Similar native plants:**
*Swamp Milkweed (Asclepias incarnata), Common Milkweed (Asclepias syriaca),* and other native milkweeds have similar pods which are generally much larger; native milkweeds are not vines and do not twine.

**Note:**
Monarch butterflies need Swamp, Common, and other milkweeds to carry on their life cycle. The butterflies mistake Black Swallow-wort for one of these native plants and lay their eggs on it. The larvae hatch, eat the Black Swallow-wort leaves, and die from the toxins in the leaves, causing a decline in Monarch populations!
**Black Swallow-wort (Cynanchum louiseae) Best Control Practices:**

*First, read the FAQs (see last page) to guide your decisions on How, When, Why, and What control efforts. Then, proceed with the following:*

- Monitor for emerging purple flowers in June, and cut them off.
- Dig out a large area around base of small plants before seed pods are present. Mowing encourages re-sprouting. Repeated digging and monitoring are recommended throughout the growing season to prevent seed pod production.
- If pods are present, carefully cut, bag, and dispose of them before they open and disperse.
- Herbicide treatment, if permitted: spray with Ortho Brush-B-Gone just when pods are starting to form (not earlier). Repeat 3 weeks later, repeat for 2-3 years.
- Certified professionals may spray 2% glyphosate (Rodeo) and .5% triclopyr (Garlon-3A) tank-mixed with surfactant (Cide-Kick II) just when pods are starting to form; repeat after 3 weeks, for 2-3 years.

**Notes:**

Plants may build resistance to herbicide. Bag and dispose of all plant parts. The spread of this plant threatens populations of monarch butterflies. Black Swallow-wort is allelopathic, meaning it releases chemicals that decrease the ability of surrounding plants to grow.

**Sources:**

Amanda Devine, Maine Coast Heritage Trust (adevine@mcht.org).
Maine Natural Areas Program, Black Swallow-wort Description and Control Information
St. Lawrence-Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Mgmt, Black and Pale Swallow-worts
Monarch Joint Venture, Swallow-wort flyer

Rochester (NY) FoodNet, Black Swallow-wort video (2:34 minutes)

**Here's some good news coming soon to the Black Swallow-wort populations near you:**

Cornell Chronicle, “Moth provides hope against invasive swallow-wort” (July 9, 2018)
Invasive Species Council of British Columbia, “Agriculture Canada releases moth to eat invasive dog-strangling vine”
Choosing a control strategy
Choosing a control strategy requires careful thought as to the size and severity of the infestation and its proximity to water and other natural resources. The Harpswell Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP) urges landowners to use mechanical (as opposed to chemical) controls whenever possible. Herbicide application within 25 feet of the water is not allowed in Harpswell. Check the Town of Harpswell’s Pesticide Ordinance.

Why control invasive plants?
Infestations of invasive plants damage the lands and waters that native plants and animals need to survive. They out-compete and displace native plant species. Livestock avoid grazing on many invasives (thistles/euphorbia, black swallow-wort), encouraging spread. Invasive seeds may also contaminate hay. Some invasives shelter mice, so increase the numbers of ticks (barberries), and others yield poisonous chemicals (euphorbia, black swallow-wort) that can affect human and animal health. Some invasive roots exude chemicals that poison neighboring plants (knapweed, black swallow-wort).

When is the best time to control invasive plants?
There isn’t one season that works perfectly for all invasives. When trying to prevent invasives from entering the seed-spreading period, manually attack them any time you can. But, when chemicals are needed, leaf-spraying must be done on green leaves, while the cut-and-paint stem applications are only effective during the late season, not when sap is actively flowing. Be sure to follow the guidelines advised on HIPP’s website to time your efforts.

Why avoid chemical herbicides?
The most commonly-used herbicides for invasive plant control are glyphosate (Roundup) and Triclopyr (Garlon 4 and 3A). Glyphosate is known to be mildly toxic to bees, which are already threatened. Triclopyr is slightly toxic to birds, fish, and aquatic invertebrates, and can cause severe eye damage.

Why use chemicals?
Sometimes, cautiously using herbicides is less disturbing to the environment than other possible control methods. At other times, the plant infestation is too large or dense to realistically remove mechanically. If chemicals are needed, follow professional advice for when and how much chemical to use. Using chemicals that are mixed too strongly can damage the visible leaves while never seeping into the root structure to kill the plant.

When using chemicals why not just use Roundup (or Triclopyr) for all the invasives?
Neither Roundup nor Triclopyr works reliably for every invasive plant. Following the guidelines advised on HIPP’s website will help you choose the right herbicide for the job, save you money, and minimize environmental damage.