

Black Swallow-Wort

Invasive Plant Fact Sheet

DESCRIPTION

Black swallow-wort (*Vincetoxicum nigrum*) is a perennial, herbaceous climbing vine. 3-9 ft. long, spiraling around itself and up other plants in extensive patches. Vines can also trail along the ground.

Stems are twining, covered in downy hairs; clear sap runs when the stem is broken.

Tiny flowers are flat, star-shaped, dark purple, with 5 fused petals, forming a short tube at the base. Seed pods form in summer and grow in clusters along the length of the stem. As they ripen, they turn brown and release airborne seed clusters.

WHY IS IT BAD?

Black swallow-wort chokes out native vegetation and acts as a deadly trap for monarch butterflies. Caterpillars hatch and eat the black swallow-wort leaves, but the plant's chemistry is toxic, causing them to die. The choking vines grow in fast-spreading, tangled mats of vines that block sunlight and kill off native plants and wildflowers.



Swallow-wort climbing fence with open seed pods (summer)



Flowering black swallow-wort (spring)

CONTROL METHODS

Controlling large populations of swallow-wort requires a multi-year effort.

- **Hand-pulling/digging:** Most successful with new, small populations of very young plants. Must remove the entire root. Use a digging fork to loosen the soil around the root system in order to maximize the amount of material that can be removed.
- **Cutting/mowing:** Plants should be cut after flowering - just as pods are beginning to form, but before seeds begin to mature.
- **Remove pods** to prevent seed spread.
- **Foliar sprays:** Glyphosate or Triclopyr. Applications should be made once the plant has flowered. Either chemical should be mixed with a non-ionic surfactant.

Carefully read the label; the label is the law.



To learn more about invasives in Medford, scan the QR code or visit <https://bit.ly/02155Invasives>

PLANT DISPOSAL

Root crowns, fragments, and seed pods should not be left on the ground or composted, as they will resprout or germinate. Hand-pulled plants should either be burned or placed in sealed bags and disposed of in a municipal landfill.



Keep Medford Beautiful is a community effort initiated by Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn to organize local volunteers to help clean up and beautify the city's streets and public spaces.



Learn more about the work we're doing and ways to get involved at www.medfordma.org/KMB or scan the QR code.

