Black swallow-wort (Cynanchum louiseae) is native to Europe. It was introduced in Massachusetts in the mid-1800s.

Black swallow-wort is an herbaceous perennial vine in the milkweed family. The vine has twining stems up to 6 feet long with dark green, glossy leaves. Flowers are 1/8 inch, purple with a yellow center, star shaped, and clustered at the leaf axils. Typical milkweed pods form, and fluffy filaments attached to the seed enable it to be moved by the wind. Roots are fleshy with a thickly budded rhizomatous crown just below the soil surface.

Impacts of black swallow-wort on your community

Black swallow-wort overtakes and suppresses other vegetation, reducing species diversity and wildlife habitat. Infestations can eventually cover several acres of land and the tangled vines form impenetrable thickets.

Black swallow-wort is the only milkweed vine found in Minnesota. There is concern that black swallow-wort can harm monarch butterfly populations. Some female monarchs will lay their eggs on black swallow-wort, most monarch caterpillars cannot survive by feeding on black swallow-wort. In addition, black swallow-wort can displace common milkweed and reduce monarch habitat.

Black swallow-wort management

Black swallow-wort is a prohibited noxious weed on the eradicate list, which means that all of the above and below ground parts of the plant must be destroyed, as required by law. Additionally, no transportation, propagation, or sale of these plants is allowed.

- Once established, black swallow-wort vines are difficult to control. For all management options, infestation sites will need to be monitored and treated repeatedly until the seedbanks are depleted.
- Small infestations can be controlled manually by digging and removing the root crowns.
- Seasonal herbicide application can greatly reduce populations over time.

What to do if you suspect you found black swallow-wort

To report infestations of black swallow-wort, please do the following.

- Note the exact location with address or GPS coordinates.
- If it is possible, take digital photos of the whole plant, seedlings, flowers, and seed pods that can be emailed for identification.
- Infestations can be reported to one of two places:
  1. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) by email at arrest.the.pest@state.mn.us, or voicemail 1-888-545-6684.
  2. Directly to EDDMapS through the Great Lakes Early Detection Network app on a smartphone or tablet.

To learn more about the MDA’s Noxious and Invasive Weed Program and the Noxious Weed Law and Lists, please visit: www.mda.state.mn.us/weedcontrol

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-201-6000. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711. The MDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.