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Pale Swallow-wort

Identification

Pale swallow-wort, *Vincetoxicum rossicum* syn. *Cynanchum rossicum* also known as “Dog Strangling Vine” is a member of the milkweed family. This herbaceous perennial vine reaches a height of 2 – 6 feet. The arrangement of leaves are opposite, oval to wedge shaped, with pointed tips. They are a glossy medium green and in late summer display a warm yellow color. Flowers are borne in clusters of small fleshy pink to maroon color petals. Each flower has 5 petals that emerge during late May through mid-July. The fruit is a smooth, slender pointed pod. Pods are light green in color and are frequently found in pairs, they are plentiful during July and August. Like milkweed, the pods open and disseminate large numbers of downy seeds

Damage

Pale swallow-wort is a highly aggressive non-native species that chokes out desirable plant species. The closely related species Black swallow-wort, *Vincetoxicum nigrum* syn. *Cynanchum nigrum* causes similar damage and requires the same control tactics. They prefer limestone-based soils and is tolerant of a wide range of soil types, moisture and light conditions but will not grow in wet areas. Hundreds of acres have been over run with this noxious weed. It is problematic in Christmas tree farms, perennial crops, pastures, roadsides, disturbed areas, parks and other natural areas and has interfered with forest regeneration. The wind dispersed seeds can travel great distances. Once established changes occur in the microbial composition of the soil.

Pale swallow-wort contains toxic substances; therefore deer and other grazers will not eat it. Since it is a member of the milkweed family, monarch butterflies will lay their eggs on the plant but the larvae will not feed on the leaves and soon die.

Control

Pale swallow-wort is difficult to control once established. Small patches can be dug out by hand making sure to remove and destroy the crown of the plant. Repeated and consistent mowing can control larger stands. The most effective time to mow is when seedpods are very small (early July), this helps prevent seed spread. Cultivating large stands on a yearly basis will achieve control over time.

Herbicides containing the active ingredient triclopyr or products containing glyphosate plus a surfactant can be used for control.

Stay out of infested areas during the period of seed dispersal. This will help minimize further spreading of seeds by boots, clothes, ATV's and other equipment.

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