

Invasives

Invasives: Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine Hirsute*)

by Lorraine Van Slooten

I have been pulling a weed that has appeared everywhere in our yard since early April – in the lawn, the vegetable garden, the flower beds, along the edge of the woods and even in the paver stone pathways. It is a bittercress and I assumed that it was the Narrowleaf Bittercress, which is a prohibited invasive plant in New York. But with a little research, I discovered that mine is Hairy Bittercress, also known as snapweed, shotweed, flickweed and pepperweed. It is a member of the mustard family (Brassicaceae), is edible and is a native of Eurasia. Now it grows throughout nearly all of North America with the exception of several western plains states and provinces.

Hairy bittercress is a winter annual that germinates in the fall, remains green even under a heavy cover of snow and begins growing aggressively in

the cool, moist conditions of early spring. The young plants are actually quite pretty – a petite basal rosette of round cotyledons with tiny hairs. The true leaves have 2 to 4 pairs of leaflets arranged alternately on the leaf stem with a larger single round leaflet at the tip. A flower stalk that can grow up to 10 in. tall grows from the center of the rosette. It is purple at the base and green further up the stem. Tiny flowers grow in clusters (racemes) at the top of the stem. Each flower has 4 white petals and 4 stamens. The narrow seed pods (siliques) are about 1 in. long, light



Photo Credit: Leslie J. Mehrhoff,
University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org

green to dull purple in color and grow vertically on the stem. When the pods mature and dry, they split open and explosively expel the small brown seeds as far as 10 ft. away from the plant.

This bittercress prefers to grow in moist soil containing clay or gravel and in areas with partial to full sun. It will, however, adapt to fertile loam or sandy soil with a wide range of soil pH values. In addition to becoming an invasive lawn weed by forming areas of dense mats of rosettes, it also invades greenhouses

and nurseries and grows in potting soils of nursery containers.

Since Hairy Bittercress flower stalks can grow throughout the summer and seeds develop from May to September, constant hand pulling before flowers develop is the recommended cultural control. If seed pods are already growing, the plants should be disposed of in the trash as the pods can continue to



disperse seeds even when the plants are removed from the ground. A pre-emergent herbicide will help to reduce the plant populations and a post-emergent systemic

herbicide is effective in large non-crop areas of the landscape.

Now it's time to go back outdoors to keep pulling out more bittercress! 🍷



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