

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Narrowleaf bittercress

Cardamine impatiens L.



Leslie Mehrhoff, [IPANE](#)

Background:

Also known as bushy rock-cress, this plant in the mustard family is native to Europe. No one is quite sure how it arrived in the U.S. but it was first recorded in New Hampshire in 1916.

Range:

This plant can now be found in the U.S. from Maine south to North Carolina and west to Minnesota, in scattered locations.



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Description:

Narrowleaf bittercress is an herbaceous annual or biennial that can grow up to two feet in height. Each plant has six to twenty pinnately divided leaves on the stem. The basal leaves have three to eleven leaflets with rounded lobes. The plant's small white flowers bloom from May to September.



Brett Pifer, DCNR - BOF

Ecological Threat:

Narrowleaf bittercress can form dense stands that out-compete native species.

Habitat:

Narrowleaf bittercress grows well in woods with patchy shade and along forest edges. This plant also does well in moist soils in herbaceous wetlands and stream banks. It is also found along roadsides, in vacant lots and in backyard gardens.

Biology and Spread:

This plant is able to spread easily due to its seed-shooting ability. Each flower contains ten to 24 seeds. Seeds are also spread by water and can stick to clothing and animals.

How to Control this Species:

Prevention

This is the most important step in minimizing the spread of this plant. Clean all boots, clothing and equipment before leaving an infested area.

Manual and Mechanical

Small infestations can be pulled by hand easily. Plants with flowers and seed heads should be bagged and disposed of in a landfill.

Chemical

Treatment protocols for biennials like garlic mustard may be effective for this plant. A systemic herbicide like glyphosate or triclopyr may be applied to the leaves at any time of the year.

Look-A-Likes:

This species also resembles sand bittercress (*Cardamine parviflora*), Pennsylvania bitter-cress (*C. pensylvanica* Muhl. ex Willd.) and hairy bittercress (*C. hirsuta*). The most important distinguishing characteristic is the leaf base of narrowleaf bittercress.



Pennsylvania bittercress

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