

Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Dame's-rocket

Hesperis matronalis



Brett Pifer, DCNR - BOF

Background:

Dame's-rocket was introduced as a garden plant during the Colonial period. It is still available in horticulture, especially as a common component of "wildflower" seed mixes, which can partly be blamed for its success. This plant is now so abundant that many mistakenly believe it is a native wildflower.

Range:

Native to Eurasia, dame's rocket can now be found across the United States, except in the extreme southern regions.



Leslie J. Mehrhoff, Univ. of Connecticut

Description:

Dame's-rocket is a showy short-lived perennial. First-year plants develop into low rosettes that remain green all winter. Flowering plants, which may reach three feet in height, have erect stems with pointed, alternately arranged leaves. The four-petaled flowers range in color from purple to pink to white. Each flower develops into a thin, wiry seedpod that splits lengthwise to release tiny seeds.



Richard Old, XID Services, Inc.

Habitat:

This plant grows in moist woodlands, woodland edges, roadsides, thickets, disturbed sites and open ground. It prefers partial sun and moist, non-acidic soil.

Biology and Spread:

Reproduction is only by seed. Dame's-rocket is a prolific bloomer and produces large quantities of seed from May to July. The seeds are scattered when the dehiscent fruits open. They are eaten and dispersed by ground-foraging birds and stick to tires, shoes and clothing.

Ecological Threat:

The extent of its impact on native vegetation and its patterns of spread are not well documented. Often forming dense monocultures, it may compete with native plants for water, light and nutrients.

How to Control this Species:

Hand-pulling or digging out plants can be effective techniques for small infestations. However, seedpods will continue to ripen so it is best if they are bagged or burned.

Where there is sufficient leaf litter, burning has been found to be an effective control method.

For large infestations, a foliar application of an herbicide, such as glyphosate or triclopyr, can be effective. This is best done in very early spring or late fall to avoid damaging native vegetation. Rosettes stay green all winter.



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Look-A-Likes:

Dame's-rocket resembles money plant (*Lunaria annua*), a common exotic garden escape, as well as our native phlox species, including meadow phlox (*Phlox maculata*).