



Dames' Rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*)

aka Dames Violet, Sweet Rocket

Provincial Designation: Noxious

Overview:

Dame's rocket is a biennial or short-lived perennial native to Europe & SW Asia. A member of the Mustard family, it is a prolific seed producer. The flowers are very fragrant - especially in the evening - and are insect-pollinated. Introduced as an ornamental, it has spread throughout North America, except for the driest areas.

Dame's rocket produces a rosette in the first year of growth and then a flowering bolt in the second year. It blooms early summer, and stems wither and die by late summer.

It is very similar to Garden phlox, which has 5 petals and opposite leaves, but Dame's rocket has 4 petals & alternate leaves.

Habitat:

Requires moderately moist soils and does best in the moist, humus rich soils of wooded areas. It is tolerant of partial shade, such as forest edges.



Photo by D. Townsend

Identification:

Stems: Stems are erect, several per plant, and grow 0.5 to 1m tall, occasionally taller. The upper stems are often branched.

Leaves: Leaves are alternate, lance shaped, and 1-4 cm wide and 4-15 cm long. They are dark green, hairy on both sides, and have serrated edges. Lower leaves have short petioles (stems). Basal leaves wither by flowering.

Flowers: Flowers can be white, lavender-pink or purple and are 8-12 mm wide with four petals. Flowers are borne in loose clusters at tops of stems.

Seeds: Seed pods are long 0.5 to 1.5 cm long, constricted between seeds¹ and become papery as they mature. Seeds are black and 1-1.5 cm long.

Prevention:

Dame's rocket is often a contaminant of wildflower seed mixes - do not purchase seed mixes which do not list the Latin names of the contents. It requires disturbance to become established, but then can out-compete native vegetation. Plants will re-bloom if deadheaded.

Control:

Grazing: Not known. *Invasive plants should never be considered as forage.*

Cultivation: Not a suitable control method.

Mechanical: Hand pulling is considered the most effective as the roots come out easily from moist soils, or can easily be dug out with a knife. Plant density may increase the year



Photo by Richard Old, XID Services Inc.



Photo by M. Frey

following control work due to disturbance, but repeated removal will exhaust the seed bank. Burning can also be effective.

Chemical:² While there are no herbicides registered for use on Dame's rocket, glyphosate has proven effective and should be applied to rosettes. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

Biological: None researched to date.

¹ Flora of China. *Hesperis matronalis* www.eFloras.org

² Always follow the product labels. The use of pesticides in any manner not published on the label or registered under the *Minor Use of Pesticides* regulation constitutes an offence under both the *Federal Pest Control Products Act* and *Alberta's Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*.