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Honeyvine Milkweed

Honeyvine milkweed (*Ampelamus albidus* or *Cynanchum laeve*) is a native, perennial vine that spreads by seed and long spreading roots. The stems are slender, smooth, twining, and without the characteristic milky sap that is typically present with other milkweed species. The leaves are dark green, smooth and large, growing up to 6 inches long. They are heart-shaped on long petioles and opposite on the stem, which helps to distinguish this species from similar looking weedy vines such as bindweeds. Flowers appear mid-summer and are long lasting. Flowers are small, whitish or pinkish, sweetly fragrant, and borne in clusters – very different in appearance than the funnel shaped flowers of bindweed and morningglory vines. The flowers will develop into a 3 to 6 inch long, smooth, green seed pod that is similar to that of common milkweed. Once dry, it will split along the side and release seeds, each carried in the wind by a large tuft of white hairs. Pods persist into winter and can then be spotted easily in the landscape when evergreens are the backdrop. The presence of the pod hanging from a vine is a dead giveaway for identifying this weed. This weed can be a problem in tree plantings since it can twine around the plants. It prefers moist, fertile soil and full sun but can grow in a variety of conditions. It is often found in fencerows and disturbed sites. Other names for this plant include Bluevine and Sandvine.

I have always thought of this plant as a weed. Recently I spent some time pulling new shoots from a bed for about the third time this summer. It is aggressive and persistent and I know it will be back. Unfortunately, herbicides are not an option for this particular site. Repeated hand removal can eventually eliminate it.

I have learned, however, that to many this plant is desirable as it serves as a food source for the Monarch butterfly. Butterfly gardening is quite popular now with the decline of the Monarch population. I came across one-pint plants available for sale on eBay. Had I have known this plant was so desirable I would have been carefully potting up those new shoots. Upon telling my husband about my findings and actions, he replied with, “and that’s why we’re not rich.” Funny guy.

Although it has its merits, I will continue to think of honeyvine milkweed as a weed in the location I have it. Perhaps in another location it would be fine. This vine can grow to 20 feet long and I have seen it take over sites with reckless abandon. It cares not for your design plans and will send up shoots at random. If you elect to plant honeyvine milkweed, choose your location carefully. Once you have it, you will continue to have it for many years. Seed spread will ensure that! Up to 50 pods can be produced from one plant. Seed pods often

aren't visible until the foliage has dropped. They should be removed from the area once noticed, to prevent spread. Use care when pulling vines with pods down so that the contained seeds are not accidentally released to the wind before making it to your hands. Systemic herbicides can be used on actively growing plants. Carefully read and follow all product label directions. (Michelle Wiesbrook)

Oak Leaf Blister

Oak leaf blister symptoms are noticeable on many oak trees. This disease is caused by the fungal pathogen, *Taphrina caerulescens*. Although all oaks are susceptible, red and black oaks are among the most affected by this foliar disease. White oaks are rarely infected.

Symptoms begin as circular, raised spots on the upper surface of the leaf, as seen in the pictures. Symptoms continue to develop become more distinctive, and appear as scattered blister-like, puckered, or raised areas on the leaves. Symptomatic tissues are often thickened and have light green color which transitions to reddish-brown as the season progresses. Severely diseased leaves may drop prematurely.

The pathogen survives over the winter on twigs and between bud scales. Infection occurs early in the spring during cool, moist weather, as the buds start to swell and open. Expanded leaves are not susceptible. Damage to trees in Illinois is mostly aesthetic and the disease is generally not considered to be a significant landscape problem. Management should focus on promoting oak tree vigor through pruning, watering, and ferti-

lization. Though not usually warranted or recommended, several fungicides are labeled to control oak leaf blister. These products are only effective if applied as a dormant application to buds and twigs. For more information on this disease of oaks, visit our [Report on Plant Disease](#). (Travis Cleveland)

Oak Skeletonizer

High infestations of oak skeletonizer are being reported from southern Illinois and Missouri. This insect is known to feed on many species of oak and chestnut and is common in low numbers on pin oak and red oak in southern Illinois, but in this case shingle oak is primarily affected.

Oak skeletonizer caterpillars eat through the lower leaf epidermis and consume the mesophyll, leaving the upper epidermis intact. Initially, damaged leaves appear whitish, but soon the exposed epidermis cells die and turn brown.

The green to yellow slender larvae pupate on the leaves, forming white, ribbed, slender, silk cocoons about one-eighth inch long. There are two generations per year. The first generation is just ending so another generation will occur within the next few weeks.

There is a high rate of parasitism in this species, so the second generation may not be all that noticeable. It is common to find parasitic wasp cocoons on leaves damaged by oak skeletonizer. They are one-eighth inch long, smooth, oval, white cocoons with indistinct brown to black markings. They are more obvious than oak skeletonizer cocoons and are commonly submitted for identification.

Although the damage is obvious, control efforts are usually not warranted. Severe damage like this in the spring will likely reduce growth this year, but a healthy tree should be able to survive without serious health impact. Aesthetic injury is severe for landscape trees, but infestations are so sporadic and the larvae so small, that scouting is difficult and preventative treatments are not warranted. If necessary, these insects are susceptible to insecticides labeled for foliar caterpillars on oak. (*Phil Nixon*)

Woolly Aphids

Adult woolly aphids appear as flying lint, tiny drifting angels, or white fuzzies, close to ¼ inch in diameter, which seem to float through the air. If you try to catch one, you soon realize that it is capable of powered flight. These aphids are green to blue and covered with white waxy strands that stand out from the body.

Woolly aphids typically feed on two hosts during a 1-year period, with most species apparently having to switch hosts. This host-switching occurs in various species from late June to late July, and these fuzzy female adults are their means of getting to the other host. Once reaching their summer host, they feed and give birth to additional wingless generations of females, producing winged individuals that fly back to the other host in the fall to lay eggs. These eggs hatch in the spring into females that give birth to more wingless generations of females, producing the winged females that switch hosts.

There are several species of woolly aphids in Illinois. The woolly apple

aphid feeds in the spring on apple, pear, hawthorn, and mountainash leaves and then moves to elm leaves for the summer. Woolly elm aphid feeds on elm leaves in spring and then moves to serviceberry, where it feeds on the roots for the summer. Woolly alder aphid feeds on alder and then silver maple. The woolly elm bark aphid, beech blight aphid, *Prociphilus tessellatus* (ash host), and *P. corrugatans* (serviceberry host) do not apparently switch hosts.

These insects are more curiosities than pests. Occasionally, a host will experience enough leaf curling and honeydew production to warrant aesthetic control, and woolly elm aphid can damage serviceberry roots. Many insecticides are effective against them while on leaves, including many pyrethroids, imidacloprid, and insecticidal soap. The woolly elm aphid can be controlled on elm leaves to reduce serviceberry root damage later. (*Phil Nixon*)

Cicada Killer

Cicada killers are solitary wasps that are about 2 inches long, black with yellow markings, and have reddish, transparent wings. The females dig ½-inch-diameter burrows that extend seven to twenty inches into the soil. This results in mounds of loose soil around the burrow openings. Annual (dogday) cicadas are captured, stung to paralyze them, and dragged down into the burrows. Eggs laid on the prey hatch into wasp larvae that eat the paralyzed but still living prey. Pupation occurs in the burrow with adults emerging the next summer.

Male cicada killers establish aerial territories where the females are located.

Because bee, wasp, and ant stings are modified egg-laying devices, males cannot sting. However, they are intimidating to people entering their territory, by buzzing and hovering around one's head. They may even butt you with their head as they do this to intimidate other male cicada killers.

Females are very unlikely to sting, with the only stings that I have heard of due to stepping on them barefoot or grabbing them barehanded. Thus, the main concerns are people's reaction to the wasps. Their burrows are also disruptive to sand traps and turf areas. Cicada killers tend to prefer sandy soil and areas with sparse turf or other ground cover for their burrows.

Cicada killer numbers can be reduced in sandboxes and sand volleyball courts by covering them with tarps during the day when they are not in use. Wasps and bees are primarily day-active insects. Restricting access during the day causes the wasps to go elsewhere.

Reduce their numbers in turf areas by using cultural methods to improve turf coverage and density. Mulching bare soil areas should also discourage female burrows. Carbaryl, sold as Sevin Dust, and deltamethrin, sold as DeltaDust, are effective in eliminating females when the dust is sprinkled next to the burrow opening. Once the females are gone, the males leave. (*Phil Nixon*)