

Silene gallica

COMMON CATCHFLY

ENGLISH NAMES Common Catchfly, Small-flowered Catchfly, Windmill Pink, English Catchfly, French Catchfly

SCIENTIFIC NAME *Silene gallica* or *Silene anglica*

FAMILY Caryophyllaceae

Common Catchfly is a small annual weed covered in sticky hairs.



Photo Credit: © ADOLF CESKA

RANGE/KNOWN DISTRIBUTION

Common Catchfly is native to Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa. It is considered a rare arable plant in the United Kingdom, and is recognized as a naturalized alien weed of temperate areas worldwide. In Canada, Common Catchfly is established in the Maritime Provinces, Ontario, and British Columbia. As a weed of cereal crops and pastures, Common Catchfly was likely first spread through the transport of grains. Common Catchfly grows well in disturbed sites and along trails.

IMPACTS ON GARRY OAK AND ASSOCIATED ECOSYSTEMS

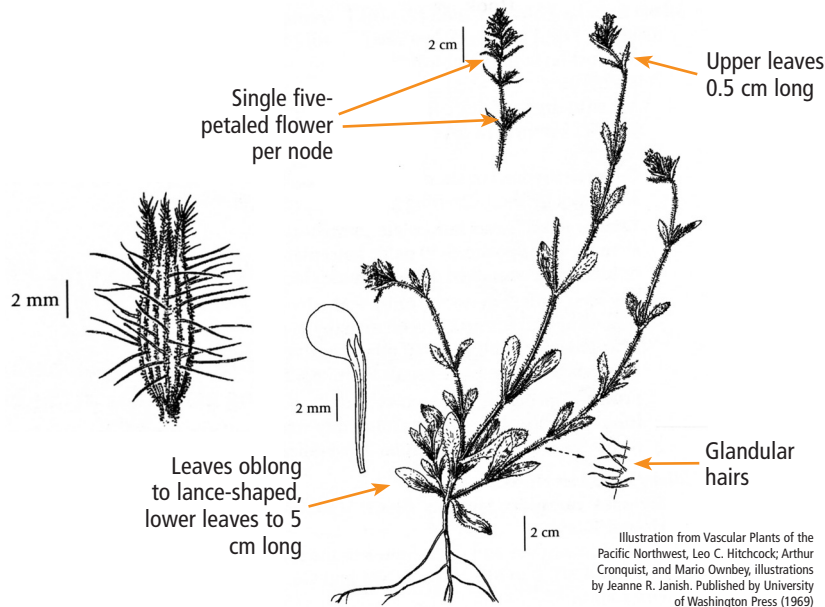
Common Catchfly out-competes native species for moisture in Garry Oak and associated ecosystems, where it is known from scattered occurrences. In particular, the invasion of vernal pool and vernal seep habitats by Common Catchfly is of great concern. As a competitive and drought-tolerant species, Common Catchfly invades recently disturbed sites, out-competing in particular the BC Red-listed and federally Endangered species, Coast Microseris (*Microseris bigelovii*) and Victoria's Owl-clover (*Castilleja victoriae*).

In Canada, Coast Microseris is restricted to southeast Vancouver Island and the adjacent Gulf Islands. Victoria's Owl-clover occurs only in southern Victoria and small islands south of Oak Bay. Both of these rare species have strict habitat requirements. Along with a number of other alien invasive weeds, Common Catchfly has severely altered many of the remaining suitable habitats for Victoria's Owl-clover.

FIELD DESCRIPTION

Common Catchfly is a small, annual herb growing to 10-40 cm tall with erect woody stems from slender taproots. Typical of the genus *Silene*, the branching stems of Common Catchfly are bristled with small, glandular hairs. Common Catchfly's name reflects the fact that flies may become trapped on the plant's sticky surface. The leaves are opposite and oblong to lance- or spatula- (broad at the end and narrow at the base) shaped.

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The leaves become gradually reduced in size over the height of the stem, from 5 cm to 0.5 cm in length. Common Catchfly has multiple, light-pink flowers with hairy sepals. Each flower-bearing node bears a single, five-petaled flower, as compared to the BC native, Sleepy Catchfly (*Silene antirrhina*) which bears multiple flowers per node. The arrangement of the clawed, twisted petals may resemble a wind-mill. Common Catchfly produces 1 cm, egg-shaped fruits bearing long, wrinkled, hairy seeds up to 1 mm in length. These seeds are dark red and may resemble those of Sleepy Catchfly, but are depressed to each side of the scar.

LIFE HISTORY

Common Catchfly germinates from autumn through spring. In BC, individuals flower from early spring through to early summer. The flowers of Common Catchfly have both male and female reproductive structures, and are pollinated by a number of generalist pollinators. The seeds of Common Catchfly generally fall close to the parent plant. However, when seeds are ripe, precipitation and human and animal activities, such as grazing and other forms of movement through the plants, may aid more distant dispersal. Grazing contributes to site disturbance, creating conditions suitable for rapid colonization by Common Catchfly. Further research is needed to determine the interaction of grazing and Common Catchfly dispersal.

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HABITAT

Common Catchfly grows in arable and waste lands, preferring sandy and gravelly soils. It grows in semi-shaded and open areas, including pastures, croplands, lightly wooded areas, roadsides, trails, and highly disturbed sites. Individuals can occur from 0-2000 m elevation. Common Catchfly can tolerate low temperatures (to -10°C) but cannot tolerate snow or very cold, wet winter soils. As a result, Common Catchfly is most successful in coastal areas in Canada.

MANAGEMENT

Develop a long-term, realistic program for invasive species removal before undertaking any work. Before taking action, obtain expert advice. Please refer to the introductory section of this manual.

The control of Common Catchfly in British Columbia requires long-term commitment and adaptive management. Management efforts should focus on decreasing the available seed bank.

PHYSICAL CONTROL: Common Catchfly can be removed by hand-pulling prior to flowering. However, Common Catchfly in British Columbia flowers in the same season as many native forbs. Hand-pulling should be undertaken with caution so as not to trample or otherwise harm native species. It is very important to minimize soil disturbance. Exceptional care should be taken when hand-pulling Common Catchfly at sites where rare or other important native species are known to exist.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL: No biological controls for Common Catchfly are known for this region.

CHEMICAL CONTROL: *Herbicides should only be used under expert advice and with extreme caution in Garry Oak ecosystems.* Please consult local bylaws and pesticide listings in your region before attempting to control Common Catchfly by chemical means. Chemical controls may have detrimental effects on non-target organisms.

OTHER TECHNIQUES: Prescribed burning is not recommended as a management technique for Common Catchfly in British Columbia, because this species thrives in disturbed areas. Experimentally repeated burns in the California Sierra for invasive alien grasses led to an increase in abundance of Common Catchfly following both spring and fall burns.

Photo-control (manipulating and controlling available light through shading and through screening parts of the light spectrum) is an experimental technique that has been used to inhibit seed germination of Common Catchfly. The seeds of Common Catchfly are sensitive to very slight changes in the spectral environment. Photo-control is

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likely inapplicable on the landscape level. However, understanding the interactions between canopy density and height and Common Catchfly germination may aid in the development of potential non-invasive control measures for Common Catchfly.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES: Since Common Catchfly is a weed of cereal crops, thorough seed cleaning could help prevent new introductions of this species in Canada.

PERSISTENCE: There is insufficient knowledge about the fecundity and persistence (viability of seeds in the seed bank) of Common Catchfly.

SELECT REFERENCES

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A comprehensive bibliography of literature specific to Common Catchfly is available at www.goert.ca/invasive.

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For more information contact the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, or see the website at www.goert.ca