

INVASIVE OF THE MONTH

***Hairy bittercress* – root it out or eat it up?**

From Brodhead Watershed Association



Photo cutline: Hairy bittercress leaves are edible and nutritious.

With a name like “hairy bittercress,” you wouldn’t expect much good from this garden invader.

It loves cool, moist locations and spreads like crazy in disturbed ground and thin parts of the lawn. In spring, you will see the green, leafy rosettes as soon as the snow disappears, followed quickly by thin stems 3 to 9 inches high. Tiny, white flowers with four petals come next. Then narrow seed pods form. When ripe, they explode, sending seeds hurtling around your garden to start the process again.

On the other hand, despite the unappetizing name, the leaves are edible and nutritious, with antioxidants, vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, and beta-carotene. A member of the mustard family, the flavor is mild and slightly peppery. Picked fresh, it’s great in salads, sandwiches and egg dishes. It wilts quickly, but wilted leaves can go in canned or homemade soups. Don’t use leaves where fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides have been used (or where your dog has been busy).

ERADICATING HAIRY BITTERCRESS

If you just want to get rid of the stuff, hand weeding is best. The fibrous roots pull out easily, and as long as they haven’t set seed, you can put them in the compost. When you see the stick-like seed pods, though, they need to be bagged and go in the garbage.

Like other members of its family, such as garlic mustard, hairy bittercress seeds will continue to germinate and grow until plants die off in the heat of summer. So persistence is your friend — keep pulling them as they appear, don’t let them set seed, and you will prevail.

More on invasive plants can be found at brodheadwatershed.org/invasive-species-management-plan/