

Invasive Species Highlight

Black Locust

Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is native to North America, but not to Minnesota or the Upper Midwest. Black locust is native to the Appalachian region and the Ozarks, where it is even regarded as a weed. It has been widely introduced for ornamental plantings, land reclamation, erosion control, and honey production. Black locust is a restricted species in Minnesota, making propagation and sale prohibited.

Environmental Impact

Black locust often outcompetes and displaces native trees, prairie plants, and savanna species, forming dense monocultures in disturbed areas.

As a legume, it fixes nitrogen in the soil, which changes local soil conditions. This increase in nitrogen can give an advantage to other invasive plants, further altering the ecosystem.



Identification

- Young seedlings are easy to spot by their long pairs of thorns, while mature trees can grow 40–90 feet tall.
- Leaves are alternate, pinnately compound with 7–21 oval leaflets. Each leaf attaches to the twig at a point with a pair of short, sharp thorns.
- Bark is smooth and green on young saplings; dark brown, deeply furrowed, and ridged on older trees.
- Flowers are showy, fragrant, white clusters with a yellow spot on the top petal, pollinated by bees. Bloom in May–June.
- Fruits are flat, smooth seed pods (2–4 inches) containing 4–8 seeds.

Look-alikes

Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) - more narrow leaflets with longer pods

Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*) - Short thorns and no pods

Kentucky Coffee Tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*) - No thorns with large, short pods



Report new occurrences

Submit a report through EDDMaps, iNaturalist, Seek or by contacting your local SWCD.

Visit our website for additional Invasive Species Highlights - winonaswcd.org

For any questions, call Abbi Hoffman - 507-523-2171 x113

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References and Resources

“Black Locust ” Gupta et al. *University of Minnesota Extension*. <https://extension.umn.edu/identify-invasive-species/black-locust>

“Black Locust” *Minnesota Department of Agriculture*. <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/plants/pestmanagement/weedcontrol/noxiouslist/blacklocust>

“Black Locust 2015” Ken Graeve. *MN NWAC Risk Assessment Worksheet*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57539006044262fce01261c5/t/5a8ecff40d92971dab638d34/1519308789435/BlackLocust_2015_MDARA00050BLOC.pdf

“Black Locust - Robinia Pseudoacacia” *University Of Minnesota Urban Forestry Outreach and Research*. <https://trees.umn.edu/black-locust-robinia-pseudoacacia>

“*Robinia pseudoacacia* (Black Locust)” *Minnesota Wildflowers*. <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/tree/black-locust>



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