Forbs Wildflowers

bluejacket

Tradescantia ohiensis, Raf.

Alternate Common Names

Ohio spiderwort, common spiderwort, cow-slobbers, snotweed, smooth spiderwort

Scientific Synonym(s)

Tradescantia canaliculata Raf., *Tradescantia foliosa* Small, *Tradescantia incarnata* Small, *Tradescantia ohiensis Raf. var. foliosa (Small) MacRoberts, Tradescantia reflexa Raf., Tradescantia barbata*

Functional Group

forbs (wildflowers)

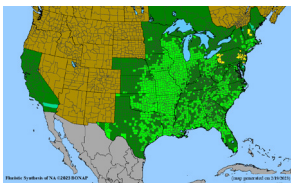
Family

dayflower or spiderwort family (Commelinaceae)

Description

- **Life cycle/growth form:** Perennial from fibrous, fleshy roots.
- **Height:** 1.5 -2.5 ft
- **Leaves and stem:** Leaves smooth, grass-like and almost succulent with a waxy bluish-green sheen, alternate, joining main stem as a sheath, generally hairless at maturity although leaves of seedlings may have hairs; stem smooth, unbranched.
- **Flower:** Clusters of few to many buds at stem tip and upper leaf axils; flower buds bent downwards within a cluster, bending upwards on smooth flowering stalks as each bud flowers; flowers with three blue-violet petals (occasionally white to light purple) and 6 yellow anthers with fine violet hairs at base; sepals smooth and hairless (helping distinguish this species from *T. bracteata*); each flower opens for a day, primarily in the morning hours.
- **Fruit/seed head:** Dark gray to black seeds develop inside three-parted capsules that split open and drop seed at maturity, starting at the base of a flower cluster.
- **Pollination:** Insects, primarily bumblebees. Spiderworts produce pollen but no nectar.

Habitat and Range



Mesic soils, prefers sandy soils in remnant prairies and open woodlands, often in areas with some disturbance; Wetland Indicator Status is Facultative Upland (FACU) for the Midwest; full sun and well-drained loam soils preferred for seed production.

Conservation Status

Global- G5, secure; New Jersey- S2, imperiled. (NatureServe)

General Comments

This species is easily propagated in the greenhouse for transplanting into production beds. Plants establish readily in prairie restorations and will spread with good management. Timing of seed harvest is challenging, since flowering and seed maturity occur gradually, and the sepals in the flower clusters may still appear green and fleshy even after much of the seed has dropped. Also, plants have a slimy, sticky sap (hence the unglamorous but obvious common name 'snotweed'), which makes direct combining inadvisable.

Establishment for Seed Production (Appendix A)

Direct seeding:

- **Row spacing:** 30-36 in rows
- **PLS pounds/acre:** 4.5
- **Seeds per linear foot:** 40
- **Seeding depth:** 1/4 in
- **Seeding method:** native seed drill
- **Seeding time:** dormant season
- **Weed control:** Prepare a clean, firm, weed free seed bed prior to seeding.

Greenhouse:

- **Seed pre-treatment:** High percentage of dormancy, seed must be wet stratified 12 weeks at 40°F.
- **Sowing:** Sow seed at 1/4 in depth in greenhouse 2 months before the last frost-free date.
- **Transplanting:** Transplant into bare soil at 30-36 in row spacing or into a weed barrier at 8-12 in spacing after all danger of frost is past.

Stand Management

- **Weeds:** Post emergence grass herbicide, tillage, hand roguing.
- **Pests:** None noted. Rabbits and deer will browse foliage.
- **Diseases:** None noted.

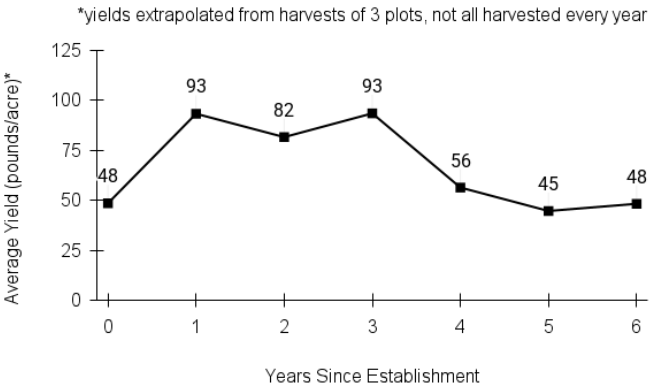
Seed Production (Appendix B)

- **First harvest:** Some flowering and seed set (24-48 bulk pounds/acre) at the end of the first growing season from greenhouse grown transplants.
- **Yield:** 40-100 bulk pounds/acre (per acre yields extrapolated based on production from 3 plots, not all of which were harvested each year)
- **Stand life:** Peak harvests in the second and third full growing season after establishment. Seed production declined somewhat 4th year and was about half peak harvest 5th year. Chisel plowing can reinvigorate stands. Spiderwort is reportedly tolerant of low rates (1%) of glyphosate.
- **Flowering date:** Late May - late June in northern Iowa
- **Seed maturity/Harvest date:** June - mid-July in northern Iowa
- **Seed retention:** Shattering occurs as soon as seed ripens in each capsule within a cluster. Monitor plots frequently during the later part of the flowering season. Turn over flower clusters and observe for opened capsules. Aim to harvest when a few

capsules are open on most heads even though some flowers may still be present. The color of sepals changes as the capsules mature; this is helpful but variable and not a consistent indicator of readiness.

» **Harvest date range at TPC (2003-2023):** June 24 - July 23 (but first year stands from transplants may mature much later than is typical)

» **Recommended harvest method:** Hand pick seed heads and dry on tarps for several days with good air circulation. If piles are thick, turn often to avoid mold. Most seed will be released from capsules as they dry, and threshing largely entails simply scalping off the dried vegetative material. Large fields may be machine swathed, but seed will shatter out of heads as material dries down.



Seed Cleaning Process (Appendix C)

Pre-clean air-dried material by scalping through 1/2 in and 1/4 in mesh to remove large particles, and then air-screen. Hard seed coats can visually mask seed quality. Aspiration (air screening) of seed is critical to remove unfilled but otherwise normal-looking seed.

Seed Characteristics (Appendix D)

» **Seeds per ounce:** 8,000 (IA NRCS)

» **Seeds per pound:** 128,000 (IA NRCS)

» **1000 seed weight:** 3.66 g (Seed Information Database)

» **Description:** Seeds develop inside three-parted capsules that split open and drop seed at maturity. Seed coats are dark gray to black with intricate, wrinkled ornamentation.

» **Seed storage:** cool/dry (50°F, 30% RH)

» **Typical seed test:**

PLS: 91% (n = 11)
Purity: 98% (n = 10)
Germination: 6% (n = 7)
Dormant: 89% (n = 8)
(averages obtained from n tests of purchased seed lots)

Released Germplasm

» **Source Identified material:** Natural Selections/Iowa Ecotype Zone 1 (northern Iowa), Zone 2 (central Iowa), and Zone 3 (southern Iowa)

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Species Updated: 12/10/2025

Notes