

Common St. Johnswort



This introduced perennial plant is 1–2½' tall, branching frequently. The round stems are hairless and light green; the larger stems have a pair of small longitudinal ridges. The opposite leaves are about 1" long and 1/3" across. They are oblong, hairless, and sessile. The surface of these leaves is perforated by numerous translucent dots, and there are often scattered black dots along the margin of the lower surface. The upper stems terminate in flat-headed clusters of several flowers (cymes). Each flower is about ¾" across, consisting of 5 yellow petals, 5 green sepals, 3 styles, and numerous stamens (more than 20). There are scattered black dots along the margins of the petals. The sepals are lanceolate and much smaller than the petals.



The blooming period occurs from early to mid-summer and lasts about a month. The petals turn brown and persist near the seed capsules, rather than falling to the ground. Each 3-celled seed capsule is well-rounded at the base, becoming conical at its apex. Each cell of the seed capsule contains numerous seeds, which are oblong, flattened, and black. The surface of each seed is somewhat roughened by numerous small pits, rather than smooth. The root system is rhizomatous, and produces numerous basal offshoots around the base of the plant.

This ecologically invasive plant crowds out native species and is toxic to livestock. It contains hypericin, a phototoxin that travels to the skin after ingestion. It is activated by ultraviolet rays responsible for dermatitis, inflammation of the mucus membranes causing itching, swelling, blisters, and open sores in animals.

Control

Pull new or small infestation sites. Repeated pulls remove the whole plant and lateral roots. Do not leave plants at the site, since vegetative growth will occur, and the seed source will remain. Regular tilling is effective where feasible. Wear gloves and avoid touching the eyes when collecting, second degree blisters could occur to the skin. Herbicides can be effective using any of several readily available general use herbicides right after germination on new seedlings and before blossoms open. Repeated applications will be necessary. Follow label and state requirements.