

Tropical Spiderwort (*Commelina benghalensis* L.)

Tropical spiderwort, also called Bengal dayflower, is among the world's worst weeds. It comes from Asia and tropical Africa and was first detected in the United States in Florida in 1928. Now it is also found in Alabama, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Mississippi. A Roundup® -resistant weed, it is a menace to more than 20 crops—including economically important ones like cotton and soybeans. This federally regulated weed poses a serious agricultural threat.

Figure 1



Aerial flower, characterized by two prominent blue upper petals on pedicels and one inconspicuous, white lower petal.

Figure 2



The plant and root of the tropical spiderwort.

Tropical spiderwort invades areas with moist soil, especially crop fields and pastures, but can also attack roadsides, grasslands, and other disturbed areas.

Figure 3



Characteristic red hairs on leaf sheaths.

Description

Stem: The stem is ascending, can extend more than 1 m, and is capable of rooting from nodes.

Leaves: The oval leaf blades are 3–7 cm long by 1–4 cm wide. Leaves often have reddish hairs toward the tip.

Flowers: This plant produces both aerial and underground flowers. Aboveground flowers are lilac to blue and very small (3–5 mm per petal) and appear 8–10 weeks after emergence. Flowers are about half the size of similar species (e.g., the Asiatic dayflower and the spreading dayflower) that are also found in the South. Belowground flowers are white and very small. They appear 6 weeks after emergence.

Seeds: Four types of seeds are produced—large and small aerial seeds in addition to large and small underground seeds.

Figure 4



The underground flowers appear as swollen nodes.

Figure 5



Aboveground seeds of tropical spiderwort may look like any of these.

Photo credits: The image of the plant and root of the tropical spiderwort was taken by Florida State University's Jean Burns and is reproduced by permission. The image of the aboveground seeds was taken by Theodore Webster of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS). The remaining photos were shot by ARS' Herb Pilcher.

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