

How to identify bastard cabbage

Posted on [April 11, 2012](#) by [Marilyn Sallee](#) (photos by Marilyn Sallee)

The highly invasive plant *Rapistrum rugosum*, or bastard cabbage, should be removed if it shows up on your property. It has several forms based on the time of year. Here are some tips on identifying it.



In fall or winter *Rapistrum rugosum* is a flat circular rosette of leaves on the ground. Many wildflowers also form rosettes in fall, so also look for the lobed and wrinkled leaves. The lobe at the tip is largest. The leaves are also rough and hairy. (see image 5942)

In mid-winter or early spring it sends up elongated stems with widely spaced leaves. These leaves have fewer lobes and can become paddle-shaped or even pointy or lance-shaped higher up the stem. The tip of each stem has a small global cluster, about an inch across, of many tiny four-petal yellow flowers less than a half-inch across.

As summer arrives, the stems branch profusely and grow 3-5 feet tall, forming a large airy mass with hundreds of balls of tiny yellow flowers. The basal rosette leaves still cover the ground densely at the base like a skirt. Basal leaves and stem leaves can look quite different. (see image 6746)



In summer through early fall the seed capsules, called silique, are the most distinctive identifier. The seed capsule is a ball on a stem, with a “beak” or bottle-neck like structure on the tip. The shape is much like a Chianti wine bottle or rubber bulb used to remove nasal congestion or ear wax. As the seeds mature the bulb gets round and the neck becomes more stick-like. These necked bulbs spiral up along the elongated stem as the plant sets new flowers on the tips.

When mature, the capsule turn brown and split open to release two brown oval seeds per capsule, and begin the cycle again.

Find out more about bastard cabbage [here](#).

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