

Curly Dock, *Rumex crispus* L.¹

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Classification

Common Name: Curly Dock

Scientific Name: *Rumex crispus* L.

Family: Polygonaceae, Buckwheat Family

Seedling

The cotyledon blades are oblong tapering to the base, dull green and slightly fleshy (Figure 1). The midvein is indistinct as a slight depression in the basal portion of the upper surface. The leaves are alternate, wavy on the margins and covered with a distinct granular coating. The petioles are flat and joined at the base into a tube-like, white to brown, papery sheath.

Mature Plant

Curly dock is a stout perennial with a tap root (Figure 2). These plants can become 1.6 m high and are relatively unbranched below the flowers. The leaf margins are curled and wavy. The basal leaves are 5-36 cm long and 2-12 cm wide. The flowering portion at the top of the plant has many dense flower clusters. There are six green sepals (three large and three small). The flower stalk is at least as long as, or up to 1.5 times longer than, the larger sepals. There are no petals. As the flowers mature the innermost sepals develop into three papery wings, each with a swelling or growth. One of the three growths is larger than the other two.



Figure 1. Seedling, Curly Dock, *Rumex crispus* L.

The three sepals which are approximately 3.5-6 mm long enclose a small dry 3-sided fruit.

History

The genus name *Rumex* is the Latin name which was used for this plant. The Latin species name *crispus* means curled and refers to the leaf margins.

Habitat

This weed is usually found on seasonally moist ground throughout the United States and Canada. It is a native of Eurasia.

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Figure 2. Mature plant, Curly Dock, *Rumex crispus* L.

Biology

Light and/or alternating temperatures are required for optimal germination. Ethylene gas has been found to increase germination in the light, but not in the dark. Exogenous gibberellin, GA3 and AC-94377 (a substituted phthalimide) promotes germination of the seeds in the dark. Feeding by insects causes a build-up of anthocyanin, which results in red speckling on the leaves. Leave may also appear red or have a red tinge under cool conditions.