

# BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

## Spreading and Hemp Dogbane

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Biodiversity hotspots exist all around the Sax-Zim Bog from habitat transitions, to very specific microhabitats, to small pockets of mature forest, etc. The more time you spend in the Bog, the more of these gems you find. Today's BogDiversity Thursday post features a group of related plant species that harbor a lot of biodiversity and just so happen to be blooming right now: the Dogbanes!

If this is a family of plants that are not familiar to you, the dogbanes are a milkweed relative that is an amazing pollinator resource. Dogbanes belong to the family Apocynaceae, which now includes milkweeds. This family of plants exude a protective, thick wax when damaged, which also contains a toxin that can be dangerous. These toxins, called cardiac glycosides, are toxic to some species and only moderately harmful to others. Famously, Monarchs and other milkweed butterflies are adapted to this toxin which they incorporate in their bodies to make them distasteful to predators. However, there are other species that are

adapted to those toxins that use milkweeds and dogbanes as host plants!

In Minnesota, there are three species of dogbane, with two of the three species occurring in the Sax-Zim Bog. Spreading Dogbane is very showy compared to Hemp Dogbane, but both species are quite attractive to pollinators.

Spreading Dogbane is a very common species in the Sax-Zim Bog found along roadsides and open areas throughout the bog. Part of the common name refers to its habitat of taking over open ground in response to disturbance. It can be weedy, but that is part of its ecology! Spreading Dogbane has abundant, fragrant, and quite beautiful white flowers with pink centers and striations. At peak bloom, you can smell the vast blooms from some distance. This species also unfurls multiple leaf stalks from a central stem and has a sprawling growth form.

To contrast, Hemp Dogbane is much less showy! It looks very much like a milkweed, but a close look at the flowers says something different. Hemp Dogbane has fairly narrow and upright growth form, with lovely oval leaves along its stem. The small crown of flowers are small, white, and really have no strong smell (compared to Spreading Dogbane!). Even if this species is not as showy, it has a history of use by Native American communities as cordage. Like Hemp, this plant has long fibers that can be used to make rope. A fairly widespread species, you can find Hemp Dogbane throughout the United States and into southern Canada.

There is a wide diversity of insects that utilize dogbane as a host! Some species are quite showy, like Dogbane Leaf Beetle. Others are muted, like Delicate Cynia (also known as Dogbane Tiger Moth). Further, some species that use Dogbanes have many plant hosts, but are also adapted to use dogbane, like Snowberry Clearwing!

More information about these species found with the photos below!

(Photos below by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Spreading Dogbane, when blooming, is attractive to butterflies, bees, moths, wasps, and hummingbirds! The prolific blooms have a lovely scent and are a really great way to add some greenery to a native garden. We have seen anywhere from 15-20 butterfly species at one time using large patches of this plant!



Hemp Dogbane looks very much like a milkweed and isn't showy in comparison it is relative Spreading Dogbane. However, the same butterflies, moths, and bees that utilize Spreading Dogbane, also find Hemp Dogbane an attractive source of food.



Delicate Cynia, also known as Dogbane Tiger Moth, is one of a few species of moth that use dogbanes as a host. You can often find this moth right near plants, as they use the dogbane family as a host!



Dogbane Leaf Beetle is a great reason to plant dogbanes in your yard! This stunning metallic green and red beetle eats dogbane and uses the plant as a primary food source.



If you enjoy Snowberry Clearwings, dogbanes are the plant for you! Snowberry Clearwing can be seen regularly nectaring on this plant and will use it as a host plant for its eggs and caterpillars.