

Hoary Alyssum



flowers

leaves

fruit

Hoary Alyssum

Genus: Berteroa

Species: incana

Priority Listing: 2A

Annual to Perennial

Hoary alyssum is an annual to a short lived perennial **forb** that is native to east-central Europe and western Asia. Historically, hoary alyssum was used as a folk remedy for rabies, another name for hoary alyssum is ‘madwort’ or ‘heal-bite’.

Habitats where you’ll likely find hoary alyssum are dry, gravelly disturbed sites such as roads, railroads, trails, gravelly stream or lake banks, vacant lots, overgrazed pastures and in hay meadows.

Hoary alyssum has a slender **taproot** and stems can grow 1’ to 3’ tall. Stems are branched and covered with star-shaped hairs; the leaves are greyish-green with star-shaped hairs. Leaves are 1” to 2” long with slender stalks. Flowers of hoary alyssum are white 1/10” to 2/10” long with four deeply notched petals. Hoary alyssum only reproduces by seed. Seeds form in flattened, oval seed pods with two chambers separated by a membrane; each chamber contains 3 to 7 seeds. When the pod shatters releasing the seed, only the membrane remains.

The name ‘hoary’ alyssum is derived from the star-shaped hairs that occur everywhere on this plant. These star-like hairs that occur all over the plant give it a ‘hoary’ appearance

much like that of hoar frost that occurs on cold, clear nights when heat is lost into the open sky. Hoar frosts causes large, white frost crystals to form on objects giving trees, bushes, and other objects the appearance that they have white hair everywhere!

Hoary alyssum can be toxic to horses if ingested and remains toxic if cut and cured in hay.



Photo courtesy of USDA-NRCS

Annual: a plant that completes its life cycle and dies within one year

Forb: - any plant other than grass, trees, or shrub often with broadleaves and colorful flowers

Perennial: a plant whose life spans several years

Taproot: a main single root of a plant, generally growing straight down