



Dodder (*Cuscuta* species) is a leafless, string-like parasitic vine belonging to the morning glory family (Convolvulaceae) that feeds on other living plants.

Appearance and Characteristics

Color: Bright yellow, orange, red, or pink.

Texture: Resembles tangled "silly string" or a messy hair net draped over host plants.

Leaves and Roots: Has no functional leaves (reduced to tiny scales) and lacks normal green chlorophyll.

Flowers: Tiny white, pink, or yellowish bell-shaped clusters that bloom from late spring into fall.

Germination: Starts as a seed in the soil, but seedlings have only about 5 to 10 days to find a green host plant after sprouting or they will die.

The Attack: Twines tightly around the host and sends out specialized root-like structures called haustoria that act like biological straws, piercing the host's vascular system to steal water and nutrients.

Detachment: Once attached, the lower part of the dodder on the ground withers away, leaving the vine completely dependent on the host.

Agricultural Pests: Some species are invasive and harmful weeds that attack crops like alfalfa, clover, tomatoes, and ornamentals.

Ecological Role: Can help control dominant monoculture plants in natural ecosystems to let other native species grow.

Management: Can be controlled by using pre-emergent herbicides, removing the vine before it attaches, or pruning heavily infested parts of the host plant.