

Smilacaceae

catbrier family

Four genera include about 375 species throughout the tropical and subtropical world. A few are temperate. Nova Scotia has a single species, here limited to southwestern counties. They may be shrubs, herbs or vines, perennial and rhizomatous. The leaves are opposite or alternate and prominently three-ribbed. The flowers are generally imperfect, borne in umbels, less often in racemes or spikes. The species are dioecious. Tepals number six, rarely forming a tube. Stamens are arranged in 2–3 whorls. Fruits are baccate bearing 1–3 seeds.

***Smilax* L.**

catbrier

Smilax is generally woody, arising from rhizomes. The stems are armed or unarmed with stout prickles. Leaves are deciduous or evergreen and stipulate. Tendrils are present or not, originating at the petioles. Leaves may be variously shaped. The flowers are unisexual with six tepals, yellow or greenish and ovate to elliptic. Berries are green becoming black, but fruit set is uncommon in Nova Scotia.

***Smilax rotundifolia* L.**

Catbrier; Greenbrier; smilax à feuilles rondes



Photo by Sean Blaney

This species is Nova Scotia's only woody monocot. It is a vine, freely branching and clamouring over shrubs and trees. The stems are very thorny, armed with recurved prickles and tendrils and may reach 10m in length. The leaves are nearly round, smooth and glossy, with three main veins.

Flowers from May to June.



Photo by David Mazerolle

Found in thickets, lakeshores and streamsides, forming dense tangles.

Somewhat common from Digby to Queens counties, especially close to the coast. Less common inland.

Elsewhere from NS; ON; ME to SD, south to FL and TX.