

Anatomy of an Invasive Black Mustard Plant



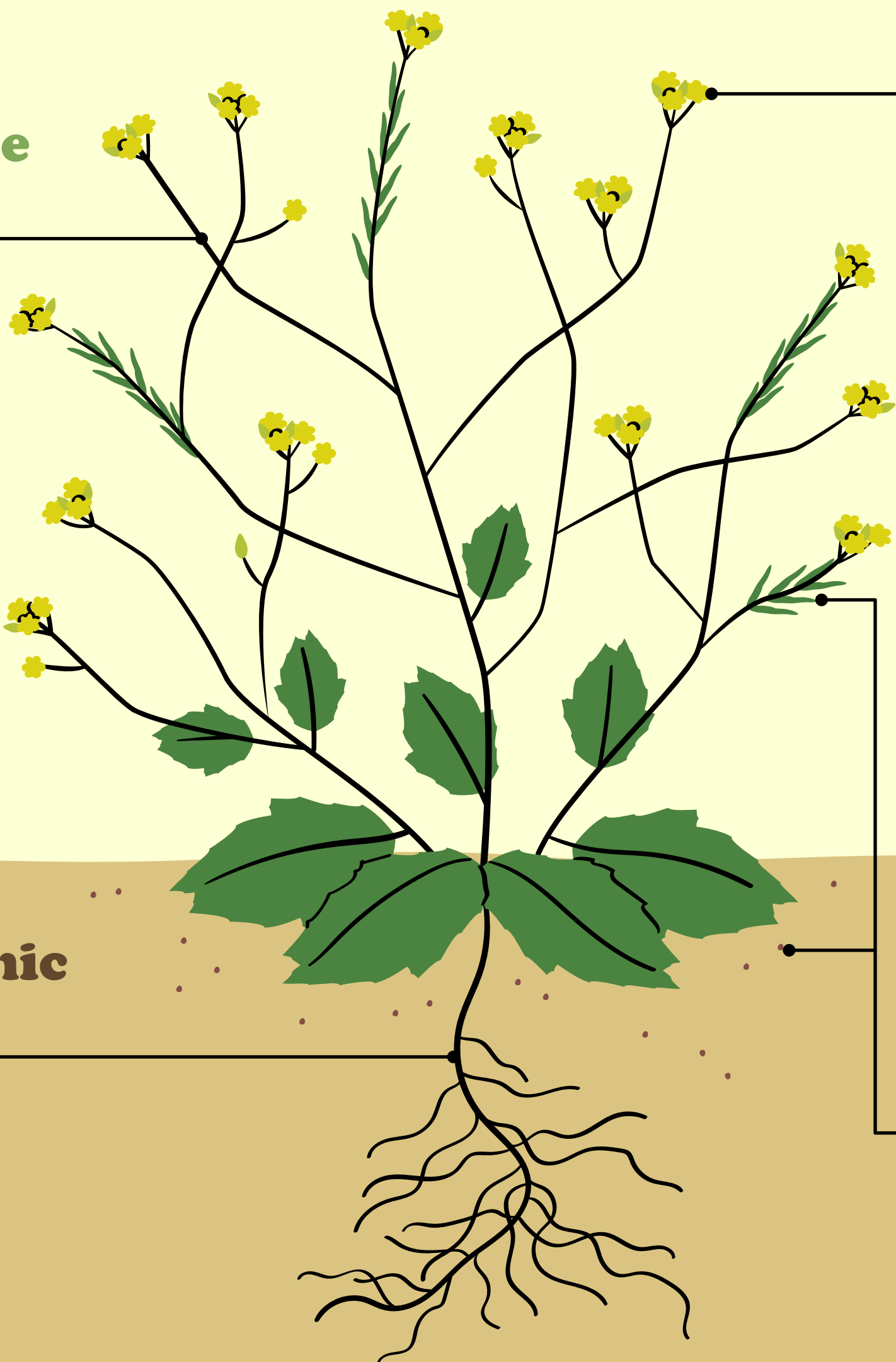
TreePeople

Edible leaves
and flowers

Flammable
stems

Allelopathic
roots

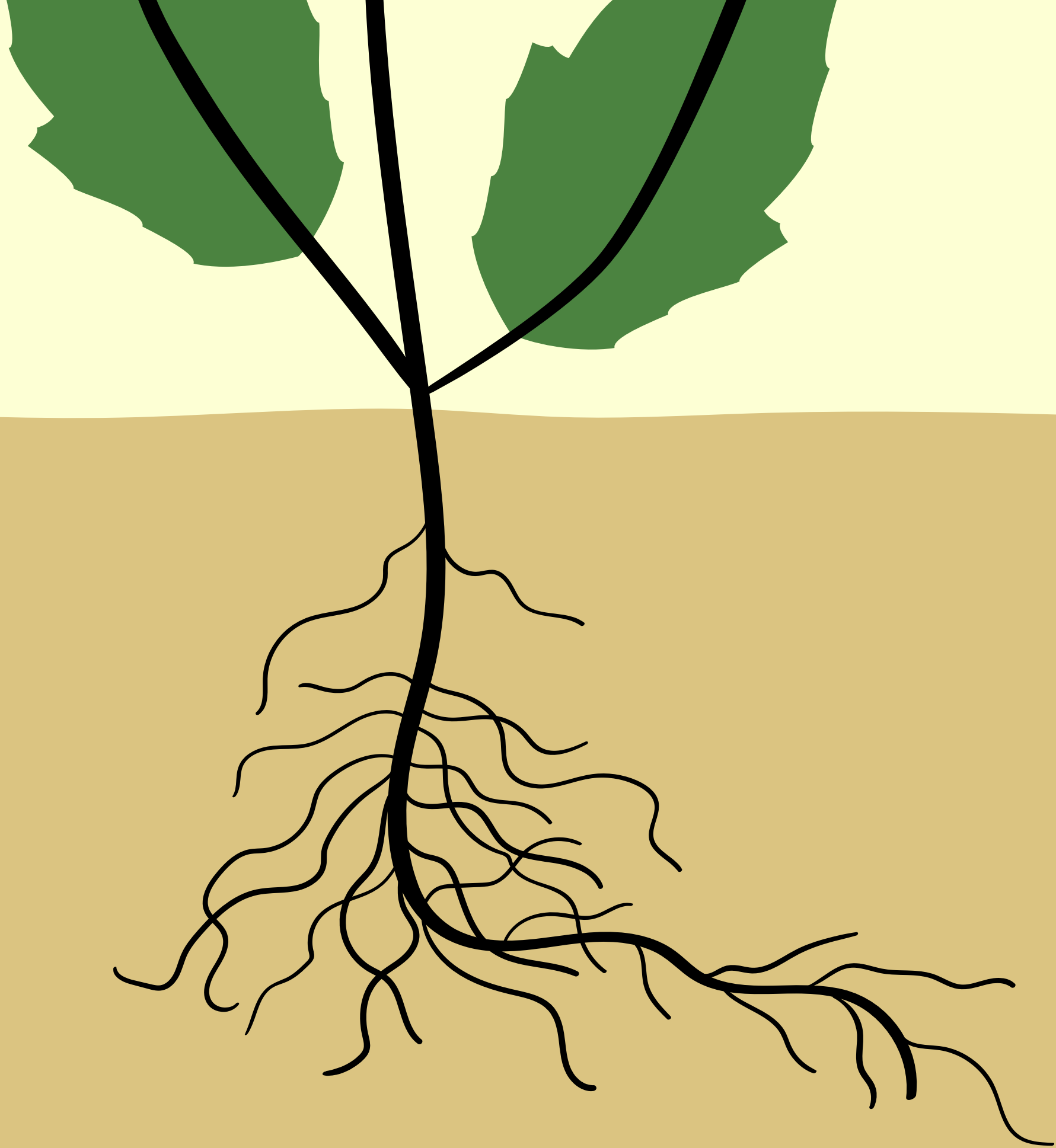
Long-lasting
seeds



Have you ever noticed these tall, bright yellow flowers that pop up ALL OVER Southern California each Spring? They're invasive black mustard—or *Brassica nigra*—plants. And while they might be nice to look at, they are unfortunately extremely harmful to our local ecosystems.

Thought to have been introduced by Spanish colonizers, black mustard is particularly good at crowding out native plants, and can also greatly increase the risk of fast-moving wildfires—which is why our staff and volunteers spend a LOT of time removing them from our restoration sites. Here's everything you need to know about our most infamous invasive.



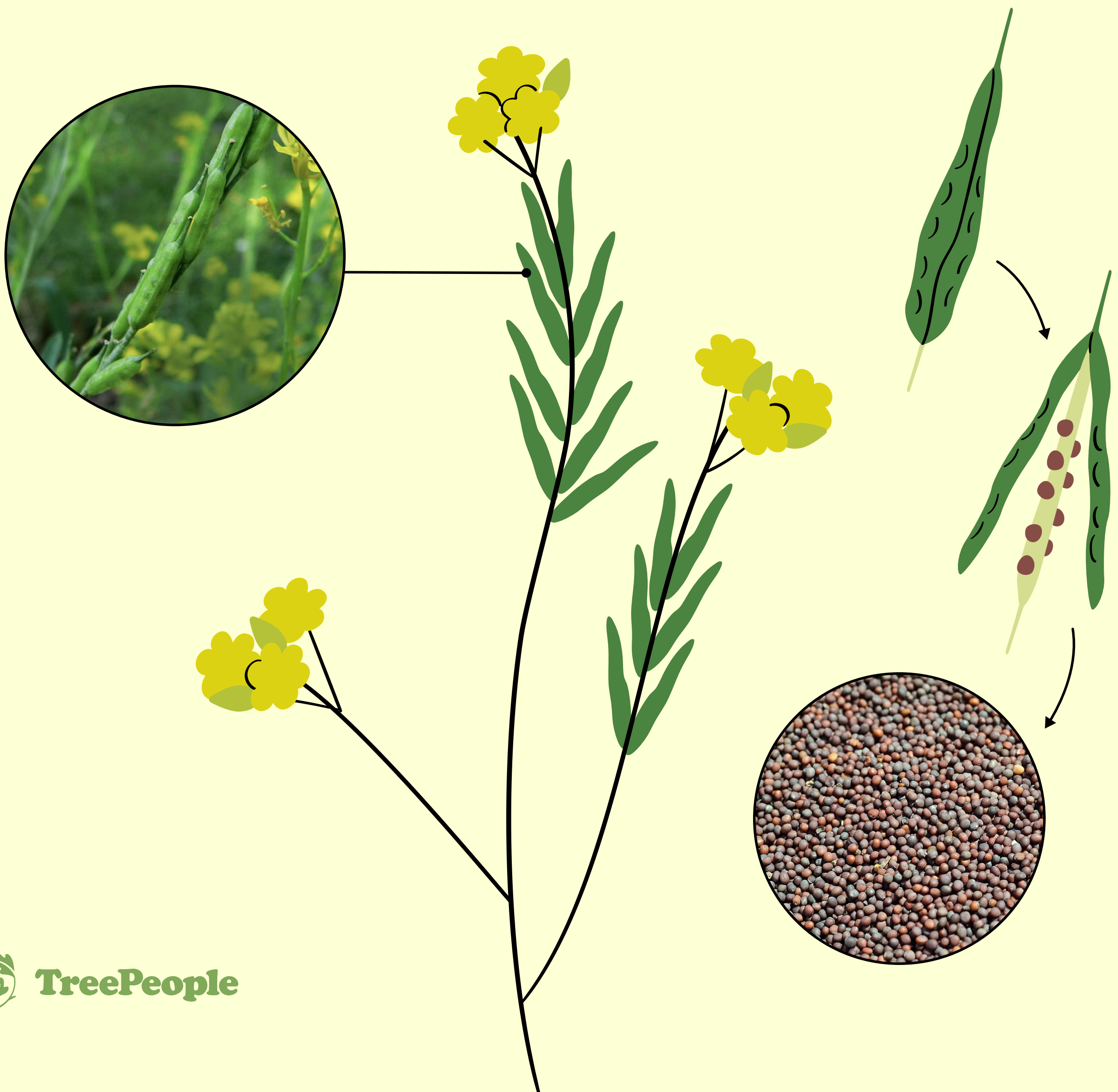


The Roots

What makes black mustard so invasive? Well, the roots are a big part of the problem. They leach water-soluble chemicals into the surrounding soil, inhibiting the growth of other nearby plants. This phenomenon, called **allelopathy**, can make it extra difficult for slower-growing natives to compete with mustard, contributing to a harmful decrease in biodiversity.

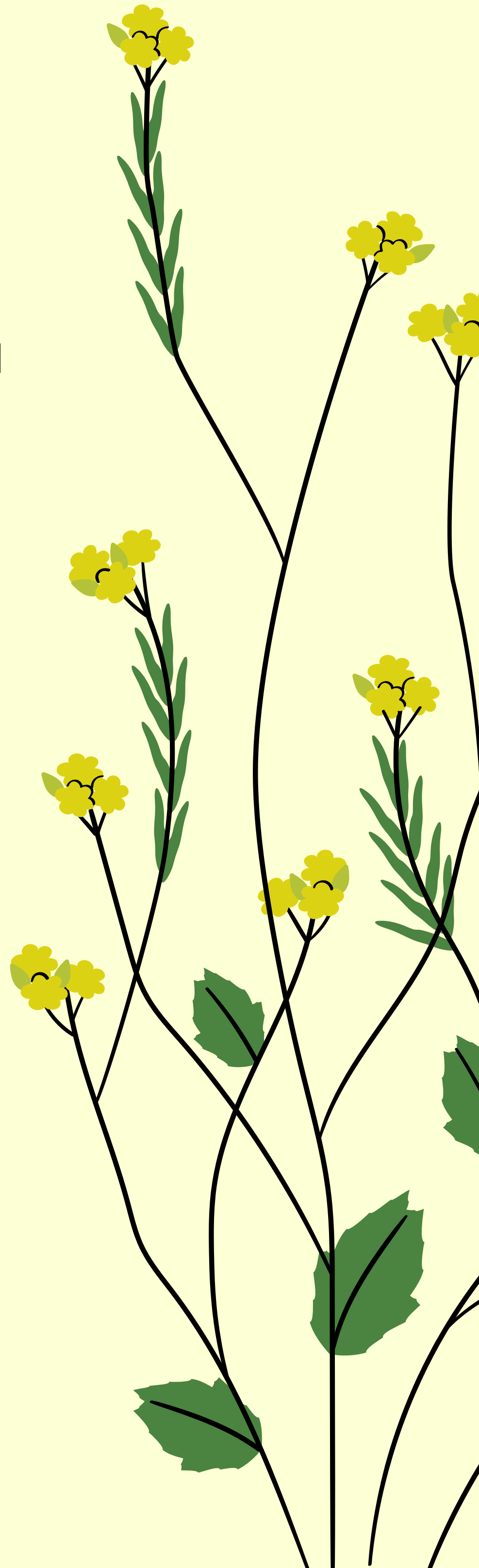
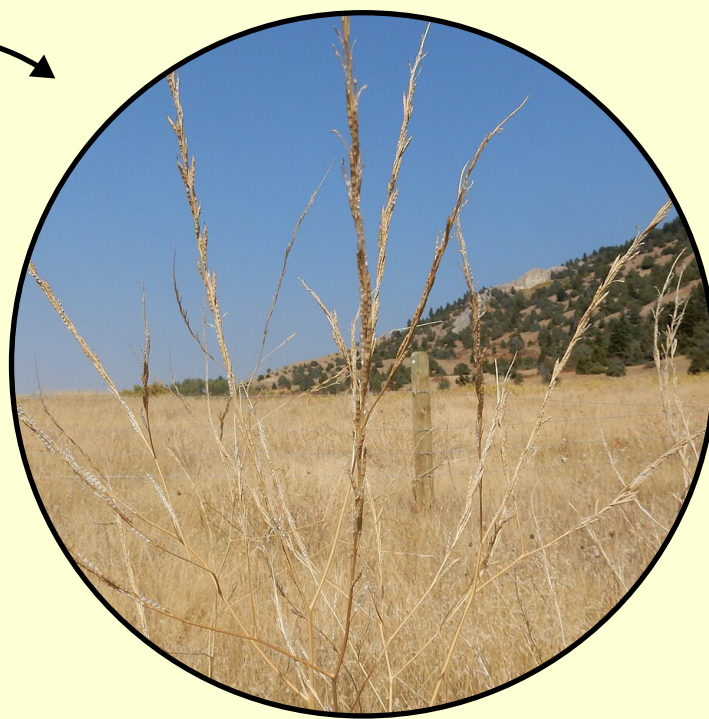
The Seeds

The seeds of the black mustard plant are incredibly persistent, and can survive for decades underground. Each plant produces a large number of seeds annually, creating a massive seedbank that makes it particularly hard to remove stands of black mustard once they take hold. For this reason, it's best to remove plants early in the spring, **before** their seeds mature.



The Stems

Because black mustard is not adapted to Southern California's hot summers, it dries out quickly and completely once the temperatures rise, transforming into a highly-flammable "flashy" fuel source that allows wildfires to start more frequently and spread faster. Because the plants are so tall, they can also act as "fire ladders" that transport embers high into the canopies of trees. The shortening of the natural fire interval caused by plants like mustard can eventually result in a process called "type-conversion," in which a formerly biodiverse native ecosystem is completely overrun by fast-growing invasives.



The Leaves and Flowers

But there is one piece of good news in all of this—every part of this extremely invasive plant is edible, from the flowers to the roots! The leaves and flowers have a sharp, peppery flavor which some have compared to wasabi or arugula. They're particularly good early in the season when they are still tender and can be used for everything from salads to pasta. Head to the link in bio for more ideas about how you can do your part and eat some invasive black mustard this spring!

