

## FC Noxious Weed Control Best Management Practices



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# Houndstongue

Cynoglossum officinale

Family: Boraginaceae

Class B-Designate Noxious Weed  
Control Required

## Background Information

**Houndstongue**, a member of the borage family, is a Class B-designate noxious weed in Franklin County. Houndstongue was introduced from Europe as a contaminant of cereal seed. It is a biennial (two year lifecycle) with a thick woody taproot. Houndstongue leaves are hairy and rough and feel like a dog's tongue, which is how it acquired its name. Plants can grow to 3 feet tall. Since its introduction into Washington it has become widespread across the interior of the state.

In its first year of growth, houndstongue produces a large leafy rosette. In the second year the plant produces flowering stalks and fruit. Flowers are reddish purple in color, followed by the seedpods which are covered in tiny barbs that stick easily to fur and clothing; hence the common name "Velcro weed." This is the primary method in which houndstongue spreads. Over-grazing and disturbance also promotes spread and growth. Houndstongue tolerates shade and grows well in wetter areas. It is a strong competitor of desirable forage and is poisonous. Houndstongue commonly invades pastures, roadsides and other disturbed areas.

## Impacts

**Houndstongue** causes a loss of pasture and range for grazing animals, increasing cattle marketing costs and reducing livestock fitness. The burs reduce the value of sheep's wool. Houndstongue is toxic with the potential to poison domestic animals and wildlife. Horses and cattle are most susceptible to poisoning. Houndstongue remains toxic when dry, and there are cases in the U.S. where cattle and horses have died from eating contaminated hay. It can also cause dermatitis in humans and is a nuisance to recreationists.



Houndstongue grows vigorously in full sun but also tolerates shade and moist areas well.

## Key Identifying Traits

- ◆ Leaves are alternate with distinctive veins, rough, hairy (resembling a dog's tongue), 1-12 inches long.
- ◆ Stems are erect and stout, up to 3 feet tall and usually branched above.
- ◆ Flowers are red to burgundy on the tips of outwardly drooping stems.
- ◆ Plants can emit a musty odor.



Houndstongue flowers are followed by prickly fruits that cling like Velcro.

## Biology and Ecology

- ◆ A tap-rooted self pollinating biennial that overwinters as a rosette the first year.
- ◆ Reproduces exclusively by seed, producing up to 6,000 seeds per plant.
- ◆ Stems and leaves are covered with hair.
- ◆ Very tolerant of shade.
- ◆ Deep tap root allows the plant to be strong competitor for soil resources.



Each flower produces four prickly nutlets

## Control Measures

**Prevention:** Learn to identify plants, know your property. Beware of seeds clinging to your clothing or animals and hay from outside your area. Do not allow plants to go to seed.

**Biological:** None available

**Cultural:** Do not overgraze. Native perennials provide good competition. Reseed with competitive species as soon as possible after disturbance to avoid re-infestation.

**Mechanical:** Isolated and small patches can be dug up removing as much of the root as possible. For second year plants, clip their flowering stalks to keep them from going to seed.

**Chemical:** Herbicides containing MSM (metsulfuron methyl), such as Chapparral and Opensight are effective applications. After the bud stage, add 2,4-D to accelerate burndown. Always use a surfactant to penetrate the hairy leaf surface. Follow-up applications may be needed. Survey the area frequently to determine if houndstongue has reinfested your property.

**FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS, THE LABEL IS THE LAW**

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