



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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BUFFALOBUR

Solanum rostratum

THREAT: Buffalobur, also called Kansas thistle, is native to central Mexico and the Great Plains of the United States. Although this plant is not established in Washington, it has become a pest in other states and countries. Buffalobur can be a contaminant of garden seeds and birdseed, so occasionally is found in our area growing in gardens or under bird feeders. Buffalobur is covered with sharp spines and produces a bur which can tangle in clothes, hair and fur. Additionally, the plant is a host to the Colorado potato beetle and contains an alkaloid that can poison livestock. Buffalobur will grow on most soil types and is often found in disturbed areas. It is drought tolerant and a single plant can produce 8500 seeds. Since buffalobur can self-fertilize, a single plant can start an infestation.

DESCRIPTION: Buffalobur is an annual plant in the potato family. It grows up to two feet tall and has erect, branched stems. The plant is covered with yellow, star-shaped hairs and with straight yellow spines, which are up to ½ inch long. The leaves are irregularly lobed and grow from 2 to 6 inches long. Buffalobur produces bright yellow flowers in May to October. The flowers are about an inch in diameter and have 5 partially joined petals. The seeds are produced within a berry, enclosed in a spiny covering that enlarges to form a bur. In the autumn, the dry plant breaks off at the soil surface and is tumbled in the wind, spreading seed. Seeds are also spread by animals, when the burs catch in fur.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Buffalobur can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Since this plant is an annual, any method that prevents seed production will eventually eradicate an infestation. Small infestations or solitary plants can be hand dug or pulled (wear sturdy gloves). Frequent mowing can also be used to prevent flowering. Cultivation will kill buffalobur plants and should be done before the plants flower. For site-specific chemical recommendations, contact the weed control board.