



Whatcom Weeds

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

Arctium minus

THREAT: Common burdock is native to Europe and may have been introduced as a food or medicinal plant (leaves, stem and root have been used as vegetables). It was first reported from New England in 1638 and is now widespread throughout the United States and Canada. Burdock spreads by seed, with the dried bur clinging to the hair, fur or clothing of passing animals and people. Each plant may produce up to 18,000 seeds and the seeds remain viable in the soil for up to three years. It is common on roadsides and uncultivated, disturbed areas and can be a weed in landscapes, pastures and nursery crops.

DESCRIPTION: Common burdock is a biennial. The first year plant is a large-leaved rosette, somewhat similar to rhubarb, up to three feet wide. In the second year, burdock grows into a tall, extensively branched plant, 3 to 6 feet tall. The lower leaves are heart-shaped and grow up to 12 inches, while the upper leaves are somewhat smaller and ovate to oblong in shape. The upper surface of the leaves are smooth and dark green, while the undersurface is lighter green and, at least on the lower leaves, wooly. The stem is hollow, hairy and grooved. Burdock has a large, thick, fleshy taproot. Flowering occurs from July to October. The flowers are purple and are borne atop a green bur-like structure. Flowerheads are clustered and numerous. As the flowerhead dries, it becomes a spiny bur, with the hooked spines attaching to any passing hair, fur or clothing (burdock is supposedly the inspiration for Velcro).



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Common burdock can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Plowing or disking will kill small plants; established plants will resprout from the taproot unless the entire root is removed. Hand digging is an option for small infestations, if the entire root can be removed. Tall plants can be mowed to prevent seed formation. Contact the weed control board for chemical recommendations.