



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226
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COMMON CAT'S EAR

Hypochaeris radicata

THREAT: Common cat's-ear is also called false dandelion, due to its dandelion-like flower. Although native to Europe, common cat's-ear has become a weed worldwide. It has been in North America since at least the 1930s, and can be found in lawns, yards, roadsides, pastures and waste areas. Common cat's-ear can invade undisturbed sites, but is more likely to invade disturbed areas (common cat's-ear was a dominant pioneering plant on the slopes of Mt. St. Helens, following the 1980 eruption). This plant tolerates a wide range of soil and environmental conditions, and can live up to 10 years. Common cat's-ear can produce over 2000 seeds per plant, however seeds do not persist long in the soil. Seeds are produced in a dandelion-like puffball, and are dispersed by wind and by clinging to animals. Common cat's-ear can be a problem in lawns, as the basal leaves lay flat on the ground and are usually missed by mowing. Additionally, the plant quickly reflowers, if flowers are mowed. Common cat's-ear has been associated with a disease in horses, Australian stringhalt, but has not been proven conclusively to be the cause.



DESCRIPTION: Common cat's-ear is a perennial herb, related to dandelion. Like dandelion, this plant also has a milky sap. Common cat's-ear has a rosette of lobed, densely haired basal leaves, 2-8 inches long. It stays in the rosette form during its first year, and starts flowering in its second year. The flowering stems can grow up to 2 feet tall, although often are shorter. These stems may be branched, and a flowering head is produced at the end of each stem. The flowers are 1-1 ½ inches in diameter, and flowering occurs from May to November. Plumed seeds are produced in a puffball, similar to that of dandelion. Common cat's-ear has a thick taproot, which often is branched. Dandelion, with which common cat's-ear is often confused, has a unbranched flowering stem, with a single flowering head per stem, and basal leaves without hairs.



MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Common cat's ear can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Individual plants can be hand dug, but the entire taproot must be removed, to prevent resprouting. Some success in control has been achieved by cutting the plant below the root crown, when the plant is in the early rosette stage. Large infestations can be controlled by plowing and repeated cultivation, for two years, followed by reseeding with desired vegetation. Contact the weed board for site-specific chemical recommendations.