



Whatcom Weeds

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

Foeniculum vulgare

THREAT: Common fennel, also known as sweet fennel, is a native of southern Europe and the Mediterranean area. It has been introduced to North America for use as a culinary crop, medicinal plant and ornamental plant. It has escaped cultivation and become a weed in disturbed waste areas, roadsides and embankments. Fennel reproduces by seed, which can be spread by water, machinery, animals and agricultural products. Seed can lie dormant in the soil for several years. It can also reproduce from pieces of the root crown, which can be spread during cultivation and by water. Once it is well established, fennel tends to dominate a site, excluding other vegetation. It is not generally eaten by livestock.

DESCRIPTION: Common fennel is a perennial herb in the umbel (carrot) family. The mature plant reaches a height of four to ten feet. Fennel has finely divided leaves, which appear almost feather-like. The stem and leaves have a strong anise or licorice-like odor. The small flowers are yellow, and grow in umbrella-like clusters, at the ends of stems. Each cluster is about four inches across and the plant flowers in the summer. Fennel has a long, thick taproot, which produces 10 to 20 stems in the spring. The stems die back in the winter, and new stems emerge from the root crown in the spring. There are many cultivated varieties, some of which have swollen bulb-like structures at the base of the stems. Another variety, bronze fennel, is a popular garden plant.



Photo courtesy of Thurston County Weed Board

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Common fennel can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Small infestations can be hand dug, taking care to remove as much root as possible. Deep cultivation may work in some situations. Herbicides can also be effective in controlling fennel. Contact the weed control board for site-specific control recommendations.



Above photo: The Nature Conservancy

