



# Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 901 W. Smith Road Bellingham WA 98226  
(360) 354-3990 [www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds](http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/publicworks/weeds)

## HOARY ALYSSUM

*Berteroa incana*

**THREAT:** Hoary alyssum is an introduced member of the mustard family, native to Eurasia. It grows in pastures, road shoulders, railroads, agricultural fields and other disturbed areas; and, prefers dry, sandy, or gravelly soils. Hoary alyssum is toxic to horses, causing swollen legs, laminitis and severe lameness. Consumption of large quantities can cause diarrhea, leading to dehydration, and can cause abortions in pregnant mares. Death may result, although most treated horses recover. The plant remains toxic after it is dried, and most poisonings are due to contaminated hay. Hoary alyssum spreads by seeds. This plant is considered a noxious weed in Washington State, British Columbia, Michigan and Minnesota.

**DESCRIPTION:** Hoary alyssum can be an annual, biennial or perennial. The tap-rooted plant emerges in early spring. It is an erect or spreading plant, growing up to three feet tall, with multiple stems arising from the base of the plant. The thin stems branch near the top of the plant, and leaves and stems are covered in whitish, star-shaped hairs. The ½ to 1½ inch, gray green leaves are alternate and lance-shaped; upper leaves clasp the stem. Hoary alyssum produces small white flowers, borne in clusters at the end of the stems, from May to September. There are four petals, however, since each petal is deeply lobed, the flowers can appear to have 8 petals. The small, oblong, flattened fruit has a short beak and is often covered with star-shaped hairs.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Hoary alyssum can be controlled through mechanical and chemical means. Hand-pulling is effective on small infestations; plants should be pulled before they can go to seed. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.



Photo credit: Richard Bauer, Wisconsin State Herbarium



Photo credit: Stephen L. Solheim, Wisconsin State Herbarium