



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

PERENNIAL SOWTHISTLE

Sonchus arvensis

THREAT: Perennial sowthistle is native to Eurasia but is now widespread in North America. This plant can quickly invade gardens, lawns, pastures, roadsides, agricultural lands and other disturbed areas. It spreads both by seeds and by creeping roots. Each plant can produce up to 4000 seeds and the seeds can remain dormant in the soil for several years. The roots fragment easily and produce new plants. Seeds can be spread by wind and water, as well as through contaminated seed or hay and by catching on fur, clothing or vehicles.

DESCRIPTION: Perennial sowthistle is, as the name implies, a perennial. All parts of the plant exude a milky sap when broken. The smooth stems are hollow, bluish-green in color and can grow up to 6 feet tall. The alternate, lance-shaped leaves have prickly margins and pointed lobes. Lower leaves are more deeply lobed than upper ones and the non-basal leaves clasp the stem. Perennial sowthistle has an extensive, deep creeping root system. In the spring, a basal rosette of leaves is formed before the plant sends up the flowering stalks. Perennial sowthistle has large bright yellow dandelion-like flowers, up to 2 inches wide, clustered at the ends of branched stems. The stems below the flower heads have yellow hairs. Flower heads open after sunrise and close around mid-day, and flowering occurs from June to September. Seeds are produced in a dandelion-like puffball and are spread by wind.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Perennial sowthistle can be controlled through chemical and mechanical means. Mowing can be used to reduce seed production, although this will not kill the plant. Repeated cultivation can be used to control established stands, however, a single tillage will only serve to break up the roots and produce more plants. Perennial sowthistle is resistant to some herbicides. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

