



# Whatcom Weeds

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

## ST. JOHNSWORT

*Hypericum perforatum*

**THREAT:** St. Johnswort, a plant native to Europe, became established in western North America around the turn of the century. Also called Klamath weed and goatweed, this plant became a major pasture weed along the West Coast. The introduction of a beetle, in 1946, that feeds on St. Johnswort drastically reduced the populations of this plant in California. However, this biological control has not worked as well on other populations. St. Johnswort can spread rapidly, invading pastures, roadsides and other disturbed areas. The seeds have a gelatinous coating that allows them to adhere to objects when the seeds are wet and fall off the object when the seeds dry. This allows the seeds to be easily dispersed by passing animals, people and vehicles. St. Johnswort can also spread by underground and aboveground creeping stems. Eating St. Johnswort causes light-skinned animals to become overly sensitive to sunlight. This photosensitivity causes dermatological problems, including blistering of the skin and hair loss. In severe cases of poisoning, symptoms may include convulsions, staggering and coma. Although fresh plants cause more severe reactions, these problems can also be caused by dried St. Johnswort, and livestock cannot easily avoid eating the plant if it is contaminating hay.



**DESCRIPTION:** St. Johnswort is a perennial upright plant, growing 12 to 36 inches tall. Multiple stems emerge from the ground and these are reddish and woody at the base. There are numerous leaves, which are simple, oval, and opposite, and are borne directly on the stem. When held to the light, the leaves have numerous, small, transparent dots, as if from pinpricks. This distinguishing feature gives St. Johnswort its specific name of *perforatum*. The numerous bright yellow flowers are borne at the top of the plant. They are five-petaled and about ¾ inch in diameter, with many stamens. Seeds are rusty brown, making the plant appear rusty, later in the summer, when other yellow-flowering plants are greener.

**MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Control methods for St. Johnswort include biological, mechanical and chemical means. Several insects have been introduced to use in biological control of St. Johnswort, with varying degrees of success. As with any biological control, the goal with insects is to keep the weed population in check, rather than to eradicate it. Repeated cultivation can be used to control St. Johnswort. Mowing several times in a season, if timed correctly, can help control the spread of this weed by limiting seed production. This will not kill the existing plants, however. Certain herbicides are also effective in controlling St. Johnswort, in appropriate situations. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

Note: This is a different plant than *Hypericum calycinum*, which is sold as a ground cover under the name of creeping St. Johnswort