

Houndstongue  
*Cynoglossum officinale*

Currently in Montana, noxious weed infest about 7.6 million acres (Montana's Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2008). Many of these state listed noxious weeds were brought to America as ornamentals for gardens, medicinal purposes, by accident in discarded soil from a ship's ballast or unintentionally in bags of seed brought from other parts of the world. Whatever the cause of introduction, 32 non-native plant species have found their way onto Montana's state noxious weed list.

Houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) is a priority 2B listed noxious weed in the state of Montana. Priority 2B species are noxious weeds that are abundant in Montana and widespread in many counties. Management criteria for these species includes eradication or containment where these species are less abundant. Management for these species shall be prioritized by local weed districts. Species listed as Priority 2B noxious weeds are: Canada thistle, field bindweed, leafy spurge, whitetop, Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, diffuse knapweed, dalmation toadflax, St. Johnswort, sulfur cinquefoil, common tansy, oxeye daisy, houndstongue, yellow toadflax, and saltcedar.

Houndstongue is a biennial that is native to western Asia and eastern Europe and was introduced into the United States as a medicinal. Historically, houndstongue was used as a folk remedy for ailments including acne, corn callus, eczema and was also used as a fever remedy. Houndstongue typically inhabits pastures, meadows, along roadsides and in disturbed sites. Houndstongue occurs in 44 out of the 56 counties in Montana. If ingested by livestock, houndstongue is fatal because it produces an alkaloid that if ingested causes loss of production of liver cells. Animals tend to avoid eating this plant when it's green, however, if cured in hay and ingested, houndstongue remains toxic. Sheep are resistant to the effects of the alkaloid, however, cattle and horses are more susceptible to its effects; horses in particular. Ingestion includes weight loss, diarrhea, convulsions, coma and eventual death.

The first year of growth, houndstongue forms a deep tap root and a basal rosette. The second year, a flowering stem is formed; flowers bloom, seeds are set and then the plant dies after its second season. The rosette leaves that are formed are broad and oblong in shape; they resemble a dog's tongue, this is where the term, 'houndstongue' is derived. The taproot of houndstongue is thick, black and woody. The leaves of houndstongue can be up to 12 inches in length and 3 inches in width. Leaves and stems are covered entirely in soft white hairs and are soft to the touch. A houndstongue plant can grow up to 4 feet in height. The flowers of houndstongue are reddish-purple in color, have five petals, and bloom from June to July. Flowers produce four teardrop shaped nutlets that are 1/3 inch in length and are bur-like because they are covered with tiny barbs that can attach clothing, animal fur, and even vehicles! The only means of reproduction for this plant is by seed production, a single houndstongue plant can produce up to 2,000 seeds!

Houndstongue can be controlled by various integrated weed management techniques such as cutting or mowing, hand pulling, cultivation and herbicides. Often control measures are most successful by using a combination of control methods. Please take a few moments to learn about houndstongue and each of the other state listed noxious weeds. If noxious weeds are not currently a problem in your area, they may be in the near future. For more information about Montana's state listed noxious weeds, regulated plants, or weed species listed on your county weed list, please contact your local county weed district (can list weed district name here... ex: Lewis & Clark County Weed District) at (406) (Phone number). Or you can contact the Montana Department of Agriculture at (406) 444-3144.