

Herb Robert

Geranium robertianum

Geranium Family

Non-Designated Noxious Weed: Control Recommended

Identification Tips

- Annual or biennial
- Young plants are low-growing rosettes; mature plants are taller, up to 10 inches with branched stems
- Stems often dark red and covered with white glandular hairs that give it a slightly sticky or oily feel
- Flowers range in color from bright pink to white
- Deeply dissected green leaves
- In the fall, overall foliage turns a bright red, especially in sunny areas
- Distinct odor when plant is pulled or crushed

Biology

- Spreads entirely by seeds which can eject 15 to 20 feet from plant
- Seeds germinate from early spring to late fall and remain viable in the soil for 6 years or more
- Roots are shallow and fibrous
- Flowers from mid-spring to late fall
- Fruits are long, tapering and beak-like

Impacts

- Out-competes native plant species, especially in the understory of forests
- Seeds are sticky, adhering to wildlife, people and pets which facilitates a wider range of infestation
- Rosettes overwinter, giving it a head start in the spring

Distribution

- Found in ravines, greenbelts, parks, forests and farmlands as well as residential settings such as flower gardens, rockeries and ornamental borders
- Thrives in deep shade, but also does well in partly sunny areas
- Likes moist soil, but is also found on dry rocky outcrops and along roadsides



Often called "Stinky Bob," due to its distinct odor when pulled up or crushed.



Herb Robert, originally planted as an ornamental, quickly escaped gardens and has spread aggressively throughout western Washington. Often it is found with other invasives such as ivy.

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control
Program Line: 206-296-0290
www.kingcounty.gov/weeds

What You Can Do

While there is no legal requirement for controlling herb Robert in King County, the King County Noxious Weed Control Board recognizes this plant as invasive and is collecting information and providing education on control. The Board encourages and recommends control of existing populations especially in natural lands and forests.

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be used throughout several growing seasons; success in controlling this weed requires the prevention of seeds, competition from more desirable vegetation and vigilance in removing new growth. Gloves are recommended when handling large amounts of this plant as its sticky oils may cause a slight skin irritation.

Prevention: Remove plants before they produce flowers and seeds. Don't dispose in home compost piles; herb Robert seeds can survive and spread from backyard composting. (Okay to put into city provided yard recycling bins as the waste is taken to a commercial operation which uses a high heat composting process.)

Manual: Herb Robert has weak roots and pulls up easily. Since its seeds have a tendency to spread far and wide, you may find it growing among other invasives such as ivy, blackberry or desirable plants such as bleeding heart, making the task of hand pulling a bit more difficult.

Mechanical: String trimmers can be effective if used before plants set seed. However, herb Robert does sprawl over and among other plants so care must be given not to cut down non-targeted vegetation.

Chemical: Systemic (translocated) herbicides can be effective on herb Robert, especially if combined with monitoring for surviving plants. **Choose a formulation that is appropriate for the site: either aquatic or terrestrial. Follow the label exactly as written and only use at the rate that is prescribed on the label.** Herbicides can be painted or brushed on leaves to avoid drift onto desirable plants. Products containing glyphosate are effective when applied to young plants. However, glyphosate is "non-selective" and will injure any foliage that it comes in contact with including grass. Selective broadleaf herbicides with the active ingredients triclopyr and 2,4-D work well for lawn areas as they won't harm most grasses. All these herbicides are absorbed by foliage and moved throughout the plant to kill the roots and should be applied to actively growing, pre-flowering plants to be most effective. Any questions, please contact the Noxious Weed Control Program.

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Pretty Look Alike: Bleeding Heart



Bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*) is a low growing, perennial herb with fernlike leaves, similar to herb Robert. This plant is also found in shaded forest understory areas. However, once bleeding heart starts to produce its namesake heart-shaped flowers, identification between the two plants is easy.

Why worry about the confusion? Herb Robert is an invasive, non-native plant to the Pacific Northwest, while bleeding heart is a native, beneficial plant that is welcome in the forest.



King County

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