

Inula britannica L. An Aggressive Weed Alert

Inula britannica is a member of the sunflower family (Asteraceae). It has been commonly called British elecampane, British yellowhead, and Meadow fleabane. *Inula britannica* was first collected in 1915 in Nassau County, New York (close to New York City on Long Island). It was later noticed as an invasive weed in Michigan at several nurseries around 1990. This plant has been primarily found in *Hosta* plants imported from the Netherlands and has led to concern over its potential as an aggressive weed in the United States. Roots and rhizomes of *Inula britannica* become intertwined with the root systems of *Hosta* and remain even after the *Hosta* rootstocks are washed and shipped. *Inula britannica* can be easily confused with other closely related plants. The following characteristics, especially flower features, will help in distinguishing this plant.

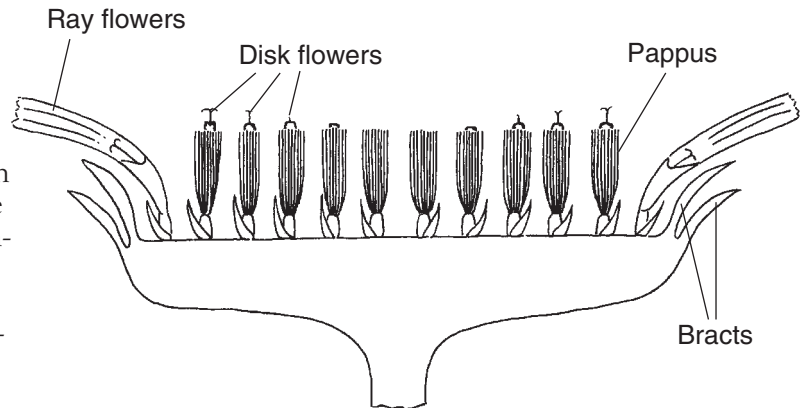


Figure 1. Line drawing showing ray and disc flowers.

Identification

Habit: This herbaceous plant is erect, ranging from 6 to 30 inches tall (15 to 75 cm). The stems may be densely covered with appressed hairs or almost hairless. *Inula britannica* reproduces by seed, short rhizomes, and root fragments. It is considered to be a biennial or perennial. A common configuration is to have a mother plant surrounded by 8 to 10 “satellite plants” connected by rhizomes.

Flowers: Flower heads are yellow, daisylike, and occur alone or in clusters of two or three. Flower heads are medium to large, 0.8 to 1 inch (2 to 5 cm) across. The **bracts** are linear, in 2 rows, hardly overlapping, green and soft. The **rays** are long and narrow, usually twice as long as the surrounding bracts. Individual flowers are surrounded by a single **pappus** of capillary (extremely fine) hairs. They flower from July to August, but in greenhouses potentially all year. For correct identification, the features in bold must be examined (see Figure 1).

Leaves: The leaves are sparsely pubescent (covered with hairs, especially soft downy hairs) on the upper surface and densely pubescent on the lower surface. Rarely the leaves are almost sericeous



Figure 2. Flowers can be solitary and leaves hairy with smooth margins.

(covered with fine, silky hairs). Leaves are not rough or densely glandular (sticky). The margins of leaves are smooth or finely toothed. Generally, the lower leaves are 1.5 to 6 inches long by 0.4 to 1 inch wide (4 to 15 cm by 1 to 2.5 cm) and are narrowed to a short stalk at the base. The shape of the lower leaves is elliptical or ovate-elliptical. The upper leaves have no stalk or may clasp the stem and are rounded at the base.

Habitat: This plant occurs in moist habitats, including river and streambanks, marshes, ditches, wet grassland, and wet woods.

Look for *Inula britannica* in and around nurseries where *Hosta* plants are grown or sold. If discovered, please contact the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries at 334-240-7225 or the USDA/APHIS/PPQ at 334-396-9464.

Other Resources and References

USDA/ARS National Genetic Resources Program. *Germplasm Resources Information Network*–(GRIN). [Online Database] National Germplasm Resources Laboratory, Beltsville, MD. Available: <http://www.ars-grin.gov/var/apache/cgi-bin/npgs/html/taxon.pl?402601> (12 June 2002).

USDA/NRCS. 2001. The PLANTS Database, Version 3.1 (<http://plants.usda.gov>). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/npb/inuladetail.html>, photos and pest alerts

Inula britannica L. (British elecampane) Weed Risk Assessment. Prepared by Robert A. Schall and Polly Lehtonen. USDA/APHIS/PPQ, Riverdale, MD.

Cooperative Agriculture Pest Survey (CAPS) Guidelines, FY2003 Eastern Region, USDA/APHIS

Acknowledgement

Our thanks to Mike Bryan, Nursery Program Manager at the Michigan Department of Agriculture for information and photos. Also, thanks to Arne Anderberg for photos.



Figure 3. Daisylike heads and ray flowers are long and narrow.



Figure 4. Upper leaves are clasp-like and flowers are usually in clusters of two or three.

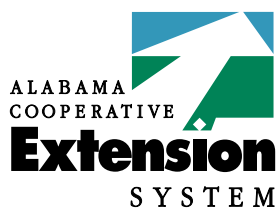
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