

Black Henbane

Hyoscyamus niger

Provincial Designation: None

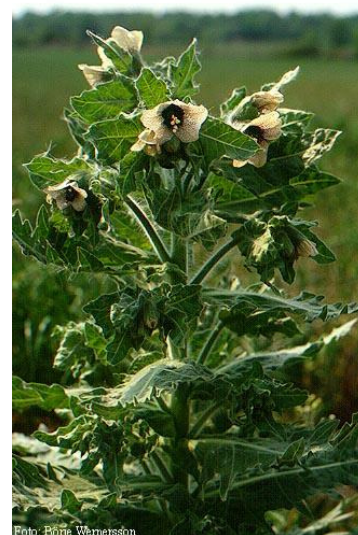
Description:

An annual or biennial plant that reproduces by seed only, Black henbane was introduced from the Mediterranean and has been used as an ornamental and medicinal plant since the 17th century. All parts of the plant are poisonous – tissues contain two alkaloids. The entire plant is covered with greasy hairs.

Stems are upright, tough and can be very thick. Plants can grow to 1m or taller.

Leaves are large – up to 15 cm wide and 20 cm or more long – and have a heavy, foul scent. Leaf edges are shallowly lobed and covered with greasy hairs.

Flowers are borne on spikes and are greenish-yellow with deep purple veins and throats. The calyx (flower base) forms a 2.5 cm urn-shaped fruit with a thickened lid that pops off at maturity and spills the black seeds.



Control

Black henbane grows in a wide range of environmental conditions and produces huge amounts of seed – 10,000 to 500,000 per plant.

Livestock generally avoid Black henbane, unless no other forage is available, therefore poisoning cases are rare. Dried plant matter in baled forage retains its toxic properties though, and will be readily consumed.

Because of its thick, tough stem and roots, Black henbane can be difficult to hand-pull, but is still an effective control method. Care should be taken with mature plants to avoid spreading seed, and the plants must be disposed of properly.

A number of herbicides are effective on this invasive plant when applied at the rosette stage, and up to just before flowering.

Despite its toxic properties, Black henbane is still valued by some for its medicinal values. Homeopathy enthusiasts and gardeners should never grow ornamental or natural remedy plants that are non-native and could escape cultivation.

