

# Hound's Tongue

*Cynoglossum officinale*

**Provincial Designation:** Noxious

**Description:**

This biennial plant produces a rosette in the first year of growth and a flowering bolt in the second year. It can also function as a facultative biennial – postponing bolting until the next year if growing conditions are unfavourable. It produces a woody taproot. Fresh and dried plant matter contains toxic alkaloids that cause irreversible liver damage.

**Stems** are erect and usually branched in the upper portion, growing to 1.5 m tall. There may be one or several stems per plant.

**Leaves** become lance-shaped and alternate on bolting plants, are rough textured, usually hairy and can be up to 30 cm long. Basal and rosette leaves are broader but very tapered where they join the plant.

**Flowers** are reddish-purple, have 5 petals and hang in small clusters from flowering stems. Each flower produces 4 barbed nutlets (seeds), each about 7 mm long.



Burred seeds



Rosette

**Control**

The heavily barbed seeds of Hound's tongue cling readily to animal hair/fur and any clothing. When the seeds eventually fall off, it can be a great distance from the parent plant. This very effective seed dispersal mechanism is one of the 2 worst features of this plant (the other being livestock poisoning) – wherever the seed carrier goes, so does the weed. This is also the key to controlling this invasive plant. Preventing flowering and removing seed is the number one way to prevent this plant's spread.

Hand-pulling is very effective when the plant is cut just below ground level – roots will not re-sprout – and is easily done. Any seed or plant material containing seeds should be disposed of in landfill-bound garbage. Mowing before seed set may also kill the plant. Excellent, long-term control has been achieved with residual herbicides, and a few other herbicides also provide good control. It's important to note that some viable seed can still develop from a plant sprayed with herbicide that was already flowering – herbicide treatment is best used on rosettes.

Two biological control insects have been successfully established on test plots in BC and Alberta.

While the growing plant is unpalatable to grazers, Hound's tongue in cured hay is readily consumed and poisonous to cattle and horses. The toxic alkaloids stop liver cells from reproducing and animals may live for 6 months or more after consuming a lethal dose. Heavily burred cattle suffer physical stress and are de-valued at market. Hound's tongue infested rangeland is a self-reinforcing spiral that destroys forage resources for wildlife and livestock.