

COMMON BURDOCK

Arctium minus

(Aka Lesser burdock, woolly burdock)



Overview:

An introduced biennial that forms a rosette of leaves the first year, and large, stout flowering bolt with many branches the second year. It prefers areas with moist fertile soils, riparian areas, and recent soil disturbance. Its prickly seed heads are designed for dispersal, readily attaching to whatever animal may brush past (Burdock was the inspiration for the invention of Velcro by George de Mestral in the early 1940's). Common Burdock produces burrs which can entangle in the manes and tails of horses and the wool of sheep and can damage and de-value the wool of sheep. Several instances have been documented where birds and bats have become entangled in the burrs and died.

Habitat:

Common burdock is found in places where the soil is not disturbed; therefore, it is not commonly found in cultivated areas. This is due to the fact that it is a biennial, so it needs areas that are not severely disturbed on an annual basis. Such areas include: farmlands, pastures, waste places, open or disturbed woods, road sides, fence rows, barnyards, abandoned fields, and stream banks. It is found both on moist fertile soils, many with high soil nitrogen content, and on sterile clay soils. Not many other plants will be found growing

around large burdock patches – most likely due to the large leaves that reduce light at ground level.

Identification:

Stems: Are erect, coarse, branched and thick, have a reddish tinge and may be grooved or angular. Mature plants grow 1 to 3 m tall.

Leaves: Rosette leaves are large, hairy, and heart-shaped and readily shade out smaller plants. Stem leaves alternate and are broadest at the stalk. Leaf edges are wavy or toothed. Leaves are woolly on their undersides, and dark green above.

Flowers: Are purple and borne in short stalked clusters along the stems. Spiny, hooked bracts surround the florets.

Seeds: Seed production starts in July and continues into the fall. Seeds are shed continuously throughout the fall, winter and following spring. A mature plant can produce from 6,000 to 16,000 seeds.

Prevention:

Avoid soil disturbance, re-seed bare soil where possible, encourage desirable, competing vegetation, and don't let existing infestations produce seed. Preventing the production

of the burred seed is a keyway to prevent spread. Clean burrs off clothing and animals.

Control:

Grazing: Livestock find burdock palatable, however infestations in riparian areas will suffer damage due to trampling.

Cultivation: Tillage will kill plants in the rosette stage – burdock is intolerant of cultivation. Mowing or cutting can eliminate seed production and should be done after the plant has bolted, but before flowering.

Chemical: 2,4-D, Aminopyralid in product combination with 2,4-D, Dicamba in tank mix with 2,4-D or MCPA, Dichlorprop, Hexazinone, Imazapyr, Linuron, MCPA, Picloram in product combination with 2,4-D, and Triclopyr are registered for use on common burdock. Always check product labels to ensure the herbicide is registered for use on the target plant in Canada by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Always read and follow label directions. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

Biological: Currently, there are no official forms of biological control for Common Burdock. However, there has been repeated interest from various provinces in researching biological control options. There are 13 insect species which attack Common Burdock. Only one of these insects, the Burdock moth (*Metzneria lappella*), has been reported in North America. This insect greatly reduces the number of viable seeds in the plant.

