

YELLOW HAWKWEED: Options for control

Yellow hawkweed (*Hieracium caespitosum*), a member of the Sunflower family, is a **class-B** noxious weed in Lincoln County, Washington. Although this hawkweed is closely related to and resembles a common dandelion, it is much more invasive and difficult to control, especially in remote mountain meadows and wilderness areas. Introduced from Europe, is also known as meadow hawkweed, and Yellow paintbrush. Yellow hawkweed is a fairly recent introduction into Washington State, but has already spread over large areas in the northwest and is spreading into the rest of the state as well. Because it spreads by creeping roots as well as seed, it tends to form large monocultures that can suppress grasses and other plants needed as forage by wildlife and range animals.

Yellow hawkweed has clusters of many small, yellow dandelion-like flower heads on top of mostly leafless stems. The erect, bristly stems can grow up to 3 feet tall, each topped by 5 to 30 bright yellow flower heads in a compact, flat-topped cluster. Each plant produces 10 to 30 flower stems. Flowers in bud are distinctively

rounded and black-hairy in tight clusters at the tops of the stems. The leaves are long and narrow, up to six inches long, not lobed, somewhat hairy on both sides, and form a basal rosette. There are also usually one or two small leaves on the stem. The entire plant contains a milky juice. Yellow hawkweed is a perennial and spreads by

seeds, stolons and rhizomes. It has a shallow root system and underground creeping stems called rhizomes. New plants can arise from buds on the rhizomes and plants can develop several creeping stems (like strawberries) that are also capable of producing new plants.

It flowers from mid-May to July and usually sets seed by August. Yellow hawkweed thrives in disturbed areas such as roadsides, gravel pits and pastures. It can also invade meadows and forested areas and is well-adapted to life at higher elevations. Usually found in sunny areas, it is somewhat shade tolerant.

Selective herbicides have been most successful in managing hawkweed because they allow the grass to remain in place, greatly reducing the germination of hawkweed seeds in the soil and slowing down re-invasion by the hawkweed.



Spreads by seed and by underground rhizomes (like strawberries), capable of producing several new plants.



Leaves are up to 6 in. long, narrow and are covered with long bristly hairs on both sides.



Flowers in bud are distinctively rounded and black-hairy, in tight clusters at the top of the stems.



Erect bristly leafless, stems can grow up to 3 ft. tall, each topped by 5 to 30 bright yellow flower heads in a compact flower cluster.



Flower heads are covered with black gland-tipped hairs.



Flower petals are strap-shaped, with notched tips.

Key identifying traits

- Several yellow **flower heads** per stem arranged in an **umbrella like cluster**.
- **Flower** petals are strap-shaped with **notched tips**.
- **Leaves** are mostly basal, covered with long **bristly hairs**.
- **Stems** generally **leafless** and 14 to 36 inches tall with hairs.
- The **entire plant** contains a **milky latex sap** and develops above ground runners, like strawberry plants.

Biology and ecology

- A **perennial** spread by windborne seeds, below ground rhizomes and above ground stolons.
- Can form near **monocultures** with few other plants apparent on the dominated sites.
- Tolerates shade but **thrives** in open meadows.
- Has fibrous **root** system and slender rhizomes
- **Flowers** in late June and

CONTROL MEASURES:

For this and other publications, see our website at: www.co.lincoln.wa.us/weedboard

Prevention:

- Clean vehicles and equipment that have been in hawkweed areas.
- **Early detection** is vital to prevent invasion.

Biological:

- None available at this time, research is on going.

Cultural:

- In scattered patches of small size, the easiest method is to dig them out, making sure that all of the below-ground growth is removed, since even the tiniest piece may develop into a new plant.

Mechanical:

- Will not withstand regular tillage, but care must be taken to pick up any stolons and rhizomes, as they can quickly re-sprout.
- Cutting and pulling are ineffective unless done with frequency and diligence to eliminate re-growth.

Chemical:

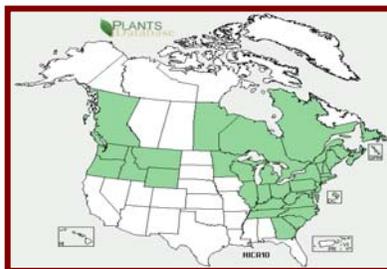
- Early season treatment with Picloram, combinations of Picloram plus 2,4-D can be effective in controlling the hawkweed. 2,4-D alone is inadequate.
- For best results, use a surfactant.
- **Read the label** instructions before applying.



The presence of Hawkweed is an indication of poor or acidic soils or low fertility. Improving the growing conditions for the grass, raising the mowing height and increasing fertilization, will almost certainly minimize the ability of hawkweed to compete with grass.



Hawkweed seems to be a weed of relatively cool, moist environments like those of forests and mountain habitats. It has not been reported in hot, dry areas that characterize much of the intermountain west. Thus, it is not generally thought that hawkweed poses a serious threat to western rangelands.



The ability of Yellow hawkweed to invade and take over pristine mountain meadows is remarkable. Once it gains a foothold in a favorable area with its huge system of creeping roots and stems, that enable it to choke out competing vegetation and to form dense stands in just a few years. It also infests pastures, hay fields, and lawns.