



ISLAND COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED PROGRAM WEED ALERT

Epilobium hirsutum

Hairy willowherb

Willowherb Family

Class B Regulated Noxious Weed: Control Required

Identification Tips

Semi-aquatic perennial herb covered with soft hairs
Grows up to 6 feet tall
Stems are erect and branched
Showy rose or purple colored flowers with four notched petals
Leaves are opposite, lance-shaped with toothed edges and attach directly on the stem
Long, narrow seed pods that split open to release numerous seeds with long white hairs

Biology

Spreads primarily vegetatively by thick rhizomes
Also spreads by windblown seeds
Flowers from July through August
Rapid growth and spread in early autumn
Has the ability to adapt to submerged areas through the development of aerenchymal tissues

Impacts

Aggressive growth pushes out native plant species
Forms dense stands that impedes water flow in waterways and wetlands
Easily spreads to undisturbed areas

Distribution

Found in low pastures, ditches, wetlands, stream banks, fields and meadows
Grows in moist to wet soils; often found growing in the same areas as the weed purple loosestrife
Prefers sunlight and open spaces without dense tree cover
Rhizomes can grow submerged in water or in water-saturated mud, but will also spread to undisturbed meadows



Don't let the pretty flowers fool you. This is an invasive plant that wreaks havoc on wetlands and stream banks.



Hairy willowherb was originally planted as an ornamental but it quickly escaped gardens and has spread aggressively throughout much of the United States.

Questions?

Contact the Island County Noxious Weed Control Program: **360-678-7992**
<https://www.islandcountywa.gov/344/Noxious-Weeds>

What You Can Do

The main distribution of this noxious weed in Island County is around Crockett Lake near the Coupeville Ferry but is also found in wet roadside ditches and retention ponds. Do your part by checking regularly for hairy willowherb on your property and along public waterways and wetlands. If an infestation is spotted, please contact the Island County Noxious Weed Control Program.

Control Methods

Most control methods need to be applied over several years to be successful. Due to the highly invasive nature of hairy willowherb, off-site composting is not recommended as a disposal option.

Prevention: Beware of varieties sold as ornamentals. If recreating in areas with hairy willowherb, check boat hulls, motors and other equipment for plant fragments that can be transported to new waterways.

Manual: Small infestations can be dug up, bagged and disposed of in the regular trash, taking care remove as much of the rhizomes and root fragments as possible. Mature flowering stems can be cut at the base in late summer or early fall to prevent seed production. Brush off boots and clothes before leaving the infested area. Site must be checked for regrowth from missed root fragments and seed dispersal.

Mechanical: Cutting or mowing by itself is not an effective control option for hairy willowherb. Shoots and

adventitious roots will develop. Black plastic covering is an interim option for dense seedling infestations. It does not kill mature plants, but it does slow down growth and seed production.

Chemical: Chemical control options may differ for private, commercial and government agency users. **Follow all label directions and local regulations regarding herbicide use in sensitive areas.** Certain herbicides cannot be used in aquatic areas or their buffers. If herbicides are used, make sure that their label specifies your type of site. All aquatic herbicides are restricted-use herbicides. Purchase and application of these herbicides can only be done by licensed aquatic herbicide applicators. Permits are required before applying aquatic herbicides. For site specific herbicide recommendations, please contact the Island County Noxious Weed Control Program.



Hairy willowherb is an invasive intruder that needs to be removed.

Native Look Alike: Fireweed



Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*) is a perennial herb with a similar appearance to hairy willowherb. This plant also grows in open fields and pastures and likes wet soil. Why worry about the confusion? Hairy willowherb is an invasive, non-native plant to the Pacific Northwest, while fireweed is a native, beneficial plant that is welcome within the landscape. It quickly colonizes open areas after fires, helping to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion. Fireweed was once used by native Americans as a vitamin source and to heal cuts.