Common Burdock

After taking his dog for a walk one day in the early 1940s, George de Mestral, a Swiss inventor, became curious about the seeds of the burdock plant that had attached themselves to his clothes and to the dog's fur. Under a microscope, he looked closely at the hook-and-loop system that the seeds use to hitchhike on passing animals aiding seed dispersal, and he realized that the same approach could be used to join other things together. The result was Velcro.

In Europe, burdock root was used as a bittering agent in beer before the widespread adoption of hops for this purpose.

Burdock is a biennial that produces a rosette of very large leaves in the first year and a branched stem with many burs during the second year. Stems are erect, branched, hollow, hairy, ridged and may reach 5 ft in height. It has dark green leaves that can grow up to 28" (71 cm) long. They are generally large, coarse and ovate, with the lower ones being heart-shaped. They are woolly underneath. They flower from July through to October. Flowers occur in clusters at the ends of branches (terminal racemes) or in clusters that arise from the region between the stem and leaves (axillary racemes). Flowers are purple to lavender, occasionally white, with outer bracts that are "hooked." Flowers dry to a bur, and the hooked bracts are often confused with a thistle. The prickly heads of these plants (burrs) are noted for easily catching on to fur and clothing, thus providing an excellent mechanism for seed dispersal. Burrs cause local irritation and can possibly cause intestinal hairballs in pets. However, most animals avoid ingesting these plants.

Distribution of Burdock in Johnson County is all along the foothills and brushy draws in the plains. It is fairly susceptible to herbicides as long as they are applied pre-bloom. Hand rouging is effective, again pre-bloom unless the seed-heads are properly disposed off. There are no bio-agents for burdock in the county.

Johnson County Weed & Pest Control District   (307) 684 - 5715