

Houndstongue



Houndstongue or “beggars lice” is especially troublesome in many areas of the County. The nutlets often become imbedded in the wool or hair of livestock, which can cause the wool to lose value and/or increase costs to remove the burrs. Eye damage can occur if burrs become embedded in the eye or eyelids. The burrs can be problematic for hikers, hunters and fishermen, and also to their pets.



Houndstongue contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids. Horses and cattle are most susceptible to poisoning from these alkaloids, although seldom consume it, while sheep for some reason are relatively tolerant of the alkaloids. The alkaloids has a cumulative effect on the liver and pretty much will induce fatal poisoning once 5 - 10 % of an animal's body weight in green plant has been consumed over a period. Death from houndstongue poisoning is due to severe, irreversible liver failure. This poisoning often occurs in horse pastures when the plant is abundant or adequate forage is not available. It is potentially toxic when it is mixed with hay.



Houndstongue is a non-native biennial which grows 1 1/2 to 3 feet tall. The heavy, tongued shaped leaves alternate up the stem and are about 4 to 12 inches long. The leaves are hairy and rough and feel like a dog's tongue, and that's how it acquired its name. The flowers are reddish purple. The seed pods are distinctive 1/3 of an inch across and covered with barbs that enable them to stick to hairs, clothing etc., which is how they spread. It grows in range & pasture, along roadsides, etc but it particularly fond of tree or riparian areas.



Control:

Houndstongue produces a prolific seed and they are spread by their ability to stick to other animals. To break the cycle physically remove the plant at flowering or in early seed formation. You can pull or dig these weeds out which will also break the cycle. Be sure to bag and destroy the plant so seeds do not mature on it after you pull it. Burning is not an effective method of controlling these weeds. Make sure you don't over graze because that's when houndstongue is able to take over. Keep irrigation and make sure that you keep lots of healthy grasses/forbs in your fields. You may also mow the area because this puts stress on the plant and drastically reduces the seed production by 60%. However, mow before it has bloomed. There are some herbicides that are known to be effective during the pre-bud stage or in the rosette stage. Pre-bud occurs in the spring or early summer and the rosettes form in late summer and early fall. It is one of the first weeds in the spring to flower and set seed making it difficult to treat timely. It is hardest to control in riparian or wet areas and around trees. There have been no bio-agents approved for release on houndstongue to date to the potential crossover of those insects to native and or rare closely related plants. However, there is an insect on the border in Canada that has been extremely effective on Houndstongue and it is more than likely a matter of time before that insect makes its way south on its own.