KING COUNTY NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL PROGRAM WEED ALERT

Spotted Knapweed

Centaurea biebersteinii — Sunflower Family

Class B Noxious Weed: Control Required

Identification Tips

- Upright branched stems, up to 5 feet tall when in flower
- Flower heads are small, oval, with light purple to pinkish flowers
- Bracts (found under the flower head) have black triangular spots
- Medium-green leaves with a silvery-gray cast, often deeply lobed and sparse
- Stout taproot

Multi-branched with sparse leaves, spotted knapweed reaches 5 feet tall.

Biology

- Short-lived perennial or sometimes biennial
- Rosette forms in first year, followed by stocks and flowers in the second
- Flowers continuously from early summer into the fall, as long as moisture and temperatures permit
- Slight disturbances cause seeds to be expelled
- Seeds can remain viable for up to 8 years

Spotted knapweed gets its name from the triangular spots on the bracts.

Impacts

- Can be a fire hazard
- Increases soil erosion rate
- Crowds out desirable native and forage plants with its aggressive growth
- Threatens wildlife habitat and degrades pastures

Distribution

- Found throughout King County in industrial and vacant areas, pastures, gravelly riverbanks
- Most common on state highways and railroads in south King County and south Seattle, but is also found on roads and open sites throughout the County
- Prefers full sun and well-drained soils; grows especially well in loose gravel and newly disturbed areas

Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control Program Line: **206-296-0290**
http://dnr.metrokc.gov/weeds

King County

What You Can Do

The King County Noxious Weed Control Program is actively trying to control the spread of spotted knapweed in the county. Knapweed seeds are easily spread by animals and humans. Do your part by checking for this plant on your property and cleaning vehicles and recreational gear if you've traveled to an area known to be infested with knapweed. By stopping seed production and eliminating existing plants, infestations will decline or be eliminated over time.

Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons. Be aware: **mowing alone is not sufficient for controlling knapweed.**

Manual: Isolated small populations can be hand pulled, making sure to remove as much root as possible. Plants in sandy soil pull easily but those in hard-packed soil will require a shovel or stout trowel. Sites where plants have been pulled need to be watched closely for new growth as disturbed soil aids in germination of any seeds present.

Mechanical: Plants that are periodically mowed will generally continue to flower and produce seeds, so mowing alone is not recommended. Tilling and cultivation that buries seeds and plant matter below a depth of one and half inches can be effective, especially if the area is replanted with a healthy cover crop.

Chemical: Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. **Certain herbicides cannot be used in aquatic areas or their buffers.** Double check the label for any site-specific restrictions. 2,4-D and triclopyr are effective at time of stem elongation (usually late April to early May) before flowers open. These products are selective for broadleaf plants and will not harm grasses that help suppress new knapweed seedlings. Glyphosate (e.g. Roundup) is also effective but will kill grasses as well. When using glyphosate, follow by seeding or planting with appropriate species. Apply glyphosate when most plants are at bud stage. Apply herbicide to the entire leaf and stem surface of actively growing plants; do not cut the stem after applying the herbicide since this will stop the plant from absorbing the chemical. An area of heavy seedling infestation can be efficiently controlled by an herbicide application in spring, followed by an application later in the summer if needed. Call the Noxious Weed Control Program staff for site specific control recommendations and additional information on knapweeds.

Diffuse

Meadow

Bighead

Other Knapweeds:
Several other invasive knapweeds are found in King County. Three of the more common ones are **Diffuse** (*Centaurea diffusa*), **Bighead** (*Centaurea macrocephala*) and **Meadow** (*Centaurea jacea x nigra*). All of these share many of the same traits as spotted knapweed and all have the same negative impacts on the landscape: they crowd out native vegetation and impair the quality of wildlife habitat and pastures.

King County
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Water and Land Resources Division
Noxious Weed Control Program
206-296-0290 TTY Relay: 711

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