

Blueweed

Echium vulgare



Description:

A biennial plant producing a low growing rosette of hairy leaves the first year, and then a flowering bolt in its second year. Blueweed reproduces by seed and is well adapted to dry, rocky or shallow soils. A single plant may produce up to 2,800 seeds that can remain viable for several years.

Stems are covered in short, stiff hairs. Stems grow 30 - 80 cm tall and generally have conspicuous dark flecks at the bases of some hairs.

Leaves – basal leaves are narrow, 6-25 cm long and have stalks. Stem leaves alternate and become smaller and stalk-less moving up the stem. All leaves are covered with stiff hairs, and their undersides often have dark flecks.



Flowers are arranged on the upper side of short, arching stems that elongate after flowering. Flower buds are reddish-purple, becoming bright blue upon opening. The petals are fused at the base.



Control

Blueweed is also commonly called Viper's bugloss – the ripe nutlets (seeds) resemble a viper's head. Its showy blue flowers belie the plant's real identity as an introduced ornamental that displaces native vegetation and does not belong in our ecosystems. This invasive plant develops a long, stout, black taproot - sometimes 2 or more feet long. Blueweed is generally unpalatable to livestock and therefore increases on overgrazed pastures.

Repeated defoliation by mowing can deplete root reserves and prevent flowering. Cut stems are capable of re-sprouting. Hand-pulling is effective in loose soil, but nearly impossible in harder packed soils because of its tough taproot. The plant can also be sliced off at ground level with a sharp spade or knife – be sure to check back for re-sprouting. Wear gloves and long sleeves as the hairy plant causes itching.

A few herbicides are very effective at killing rosettes and bolting plants when applied properly.

Mid to late summer rains generally produce a second crop of seedlings, therefore a late August/early September repeat of control measures can remove what would be next year's bolting plants, and also helps to deplete the seed bank.



Post-flowering