

O. Houndstongue (“Beggar’s Lice”) (*Cynoglossum officinale* L.)

Key Characteristics:

Houndstongue is a member of the Borage family. A biennial introduced from Europe, it reproduces only by seed and lives its first year as a **leafy rosette**. The stout, erect, **stem** appears the second year, growing 1-4 feet high.

Leaves are alternate, oblong to lance-shaped, 1-12 inches long, 1-3 inches wide, lacking teeth or lobes, and with soft, white hairs. **Leaves** often appear dusty or insect-ridden, and may have reddish streaks. **Flowers** are reddish-purple in color. The **fruit** consists of four nutlets, each about 1/3 inch long. The seeds are covered in short prickles which act like Velcro and are rapidly scattered by animals, socks, shoes, etc. Houndstongue is **toxic to horses, livestock, and wildlife**, containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids that can stop liver cells from reproducing. Animals may live up to six months after ingesting a lethal dose.



Locations:

A prolific seed producer and excellent hitch-hiker, Houndstongue is widespread throughout Pitkin County, particularly in areas of past or current livestock grazing, but also along hiking trails, in riparian zones, and other high-traffic areas.

Biological control:

No known biological controls at this time.

Cultural control:

Re-seed disturbed sites with fast-growing native grasses. Maintain range and pasture in good condition. Promote healthy grass growth through proper irrigation and fertilization. Particular care should be taken not to overgraze pastures where Houndstongue is present, as likely hood of lethal ingestion by livestock is greatly increased. Caution should also be taken not to purchase or distribute contaminated hay, as dried and diluted Houndstongue leaves are more palatable to animals.

Mechanical control:

The key to managing Houndstongue is to keep seeds from spreading. This is best achieved by pulling or digging the plant at flowering or early seed formation, bagging, and removing plants. Regular cultivation, digging, pulling and cutting are effective if done frequently — the plant’s hearty taproot can support several re-sprouts in one season if not removed.

Chemical control:

Contact Pitkin County Land Management Department for more specific information about herbicide products, application rates, and equipment calibration.

