

Common Burdock (*Arctium minus*)

DESCRIPTION:

Common burdock is a member of the aster family which grows in disturbed ground typically in rural settings but also in urban waste areas and disturbed woodlands. When found in woodlands this species is a strong indicator of overgrazing. This aggressive weed is a biennial or short-lived perennial, typically bolting and flowering in the second year, but if growing conditions are poor it will simply continue living a few more years until it has the energy to flower effectively. The clingy seeds of this plant inspired the invention of Velcro. Remember how inspirational they are next time you're digging them out of your socks. The roots are edible and also purported to have medicinal qualities.

-3
Aggressive
Weed

IDENTIFICATION:

The most distinctive feature of burdock is its large basal leaves which can be over 18" long. The edges of the leaves are un-toothed, but often irregular and rippled or wavy. The leaves are pale on the underside and have a distinctive, unpleasant odor if damaged. The flower stalks of mature plants can reach 6' in height, but are more typically around 3'. Multiple large leaves arise from them and the purple flowers are born in clusters. The flowers themselves are pinkish-purple in color and are surrounded by the distinctive hooked spikes that form the spherical clingy seed heads.

Great burdock (*Arctium lappa*) is also a noxious weed and is particularly common in the Madison area. This species can reach heights of 9' and has individual seed heads which are noticeably larger than those of common burdock, each on its own 1" or longer stalk. The seed pods of cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) are similar to burdock seeds, however they are shaped more like a football. People commonly use "cocklebur" to describe any clinging seed.



CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Kill burdock by cutting the root below the soil surface and then pulling the plant out by hand, extracting a large portion of the tap root. For small plants a dandelion digging tool will be effective; other tools intended to remove garden and lawn weeds will also work on young burdocks. For larger individuals try a sharpened shovel or Parsnip Predator.

Another effective control method is cutting or mowing after the plants have bolted, but before the flowers are fully open. A second mowing will be required to control resprouting plants. For plants that have already gone to seed, clip the seed heads off and removing them from the site to reduce the establishment of new plants.

Chemical: Young burdock can be killed with a foliar spray of a 2% solution of glyphosate (RoundUp®, etc.) and its large leaves make for excellent chemical absorption. Do not spray so much herbicide that it drips off on to nearby plants. If native grasses are in the area then a broadleaf specific herbicide containing clopyralid (Transline®) at .5 oz per gallon of water is an effective alternative.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Prevent the establishment of other weeds after removing burdock by establishing a diverse mix of native species by seeds or plugs. While there are many species that will do well in shade or sun specifically, wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*), solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), starry false solomon's seal (*Smilacina stellata*) and golden alexanders (*Zizia aurea*) can be planted in shade or sun to replace burdock wherever it is found.

