

Curly Dock (*Rumex crispus*)

DESCRIPTION:

This European species was first observed in the United States in 1748. Curly dock is a perennial forb that is common in moist areas, cultivated croplands, degraded wetlands and pastures. Also referred to as sour dock or yellow dock, just one of these stout plants can produce 40,000 seeds each year, making it a persistent pest in disturbed areas. Caterpillars of some moth and butterfly species eat the foliage, while various gamebirds and white-footed mice eat the seeds.

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Persistent Weed

IDENTIFICATION:

Curly dock plants stand erect and can grow up to four feet tall. However, young plants often sprawl out in a prostrate form, much like a large dandelion. The leaf margins are entire without lobes, instead the margins are curly or wavy form, true to its name. Leaves are lance-shaped, alternately arranged on the stem and can vary in color, from entirely green to red tinged. As a typical member of the buckwheat family, curly dock has a membranous sheath at its leaf base and swollen stem joints. Tiny green flower clusters bloom along the upper portion of the plants long stalks, which eventually develop into three-winged seeds, turning a distinctive rusty brown at maturity. The seeds of this plant can persist in the ground and remain viable for several decades.



CONTROL METHODS:

Organic: Cut the root several inches below the soil surface with a Parsnip Predator or sharpened spade and pull entire plant out by hand. A dandelion digging tool or weeding tool will be effective for removing small plants.

Mowing or cutting can provide temporary suppression if done after flowering begins, but before seeds develop. A second mowing will likely be needed to control resprouting plants. If seeds have already developed, clip the entire seed head and remove from site. The root crown must be removed, or the leaves treated with herbicide to actually kill the root.

Chemical: During the rosette stage, young curly dock plants can be killed with a foliar spray of glyphosate solution (Roundup®, etc.). If native grasses are present on site, a broad-leaf specific herbicide containing aminopyralid (Milestone®) would be an effective alternative.

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



NATIVE

ALTERNATIVES:

We recommend a diverse selection of prairie species to replace and compete against curly dock in order to develop a more stable and productive plant community for the site. Contact us for specific recommendations.