

Common burdock

Arctium minus

What it is

Burdock is a large-leaved invasive plant, often encountered along river trails, that produces round, brown, marble-size seed heads that stick in people’s shoelaces or in their dog’s furry underparts.

Where it’s found

This hideous plant, which first arrived in North America from Europe in the 1600s, shows up throughout Montana in moist areas like stream and river banks, old fields, and woodland edges.

What it looks like

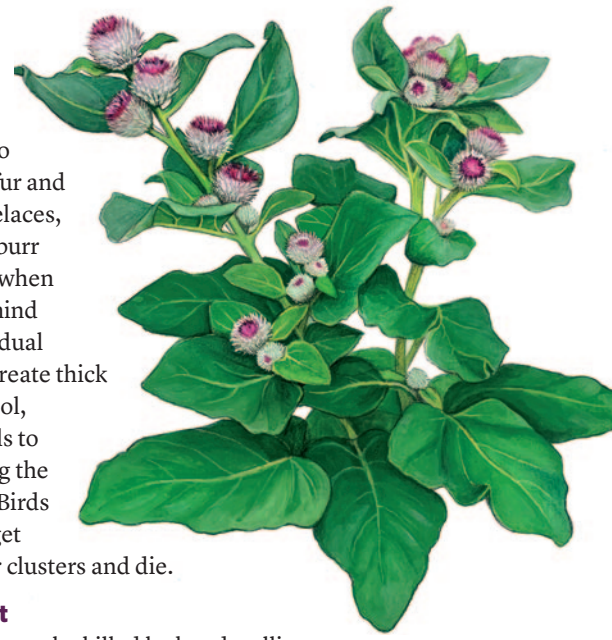
Burdock starts off as a large-leaved rosette that looks a lot like rhubarb. The second year, stalks grow 2 to 5 feet tall and sprout purple flowers that resemble thistles and bloom in late summer. Then the flowerheads dry and drop off, exposing large brown seed heads (burrs) covered in tiny, hooked, Velcro-like “bracts” that stick to almost anything.



Illustrations by Liz Bradford

Why we hate it

Burdock is a pain to remove from dog fur and human socks, shoelaces, and clothing. The burr heads break apart when pulled, leaving behind hundreds of individual bracts. They also create thick mats in sheep’s wool, causing the animals to suffer and reducing the value of the wool. Birds and bats can also get trapped in the burr clusters and die.



How to get rid of it

Individual burdock can be killed by hand-pulling or digging out the deep taproot. Some herbicides work on the rosette stage. Mowing can control the spread when done before the plant flowers. Bozeman-based Sacajawea Audubon and other Audubon chapters hold burdock removal days to reduce harm to birds. ■

Learn more about noxious weed control at mtweed.org.

“Carrying capacity”

A quick look at a concept or term commonly used in fisheries, wildlife, or state parks management.

Two kinds of carrying capacities affect FWP decisions about wildlife management. *Biological* carrying capacity refers to the population size that a given habitat can sustainably support. This is determined by ecological factors such as available food, shelter, and water. Based on population surveys and other information, FWP wildlife managers estimate the biological carrying capacities for different game species in each hunting district.

Social carrying capacity is the population size of various species that people—landowners especially—will tolerate. Often this is far lower than the biological carrying capacity. For instance, much of western and central Montana could biologically support far more grizzly bears than exist today. But ranchers, homeowners, and others will accept having only so many grizzlies where they live.

The same is true with elk in many areas.

THE MICRO MANAGER

The land may support lots of elk, but all those elk may cause degradation problems for landowners. That means the social carrying capacity may be far lower than the biological carrying capacity. ■



At “capacity”? That depends on which definition you’re using.