

# Houndstongue *Cynoglossum officinale*



Illustrations by Liz Bradford

**What it is**

Houndstongue, also known as beggar’s lice, is a noxious weed that came to the United States in the late 1900s mixed with grain from Europe and Asia. This biennial plant grows only leaves its first year, then produces stems 1 to 4 feet tall, with branches covered in sticky seeds. The plant’s name comes from the leaves, which resemble a dog’s tongue.

**Where it is**

Houndstongue is found throughout Montana, most commonly along streams and rivers, in road ditches, and on construction sites and other disturbed areas.

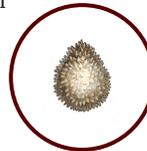
**How it spreads**

Roughly the size of small watermelon seeds, brown houndstongue seeds are covered in tiny Velcro-like hooks

that latch onto clothing or animal fur. Cattle sometimes become covered in houndstongue seeds, as do bird dogs after a day afield.

**Why we hate it**

Bird hunters despise the seeds, which can take hours to pull from a long-haired dog’s coat or a wool hunting jacket. When embedded in sheep, houndstongue seeds greatly reduce the value of wool. Even worse, the plant can poison livestock, especially horses, and outcompetes native vegetation eaten by livestock and wildlife.



2X ACTUAL SIZE

**How to control it**

Hunters need to pull any seeds off their clothing or dog’s fur as close to the plants as possible. Don’t “pick and flick” when you get back to the vehicle, which spreads seeds to new areas. Put them in a plastic bag and then a garbage bin or burn barrel. Landowners can pull the plants by hand or mow flowering plants to the base and properly dispose of them to prevent seed production. ■

*Learn more about noxious weed control at [mtweed.org](http://mtweed.org)*

## THE MICRO MANAGER

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

### “Conifer Expansion”

Conifer expansion, or succession, is the process of coniferous trees such as Douglas fir expanding into and taking over open grasslands or shrublands. It’s a problem for grazing wildlife such as elk that feed on grass, mule deer that need shrubs like bitterbrush, and for sage-grouse and other sagebrush-dependent species.

Historically, many grasslands were kept open by wildfires caused by lightning strikes or by intentional fires set by Native Americans. But for the past century, most wildfires have been suppressed to protect homes and communities, depriving open areas of the flames’ cleansing benefits. Lacking shade, grasslands are usually too hot for conifers to survive, but during wet, cool periods—like from the 1940s through late 1970s— young trees can gain a toehold and then produce enough shade for each other to foster growth and further expansion.

FWP, conservation groups such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Mule Deer Foundation, and landowners work to keep open areas open on public and private property by cutting

down trees taking over grasslands or using prescribed burns to kill seedlings and saplings. FWP’s focus is mainly on reducing conifer expansion on state wildlife management areas, where crews are hired to cut down trees. Larger trees can be sold as saw logs and pulp to offset the costs of the work, while smaller logs are burned in winter or ground into wood chips. ■



**A conifer removal project funded by the Sage Grouse Initiative.**