

# COMMON BURDOCK

## *Arctium minus* L.

**Family:** Asteraceae (Sunflower).

**Other Scientific Names:** None.

**Other Common Names:** Lesser burdock, wild burdock, bardane, wild rhubarb, beggars button.

**Legal Status:** Regional Noxious: Bulkley-Nechako, Cariboo, Columbia-Shuswap, Fraser-Fort George, Kitimat-Stikine, North Okanagan, Okanagan-Similkameen, Peace River, Thompson-Nicola.



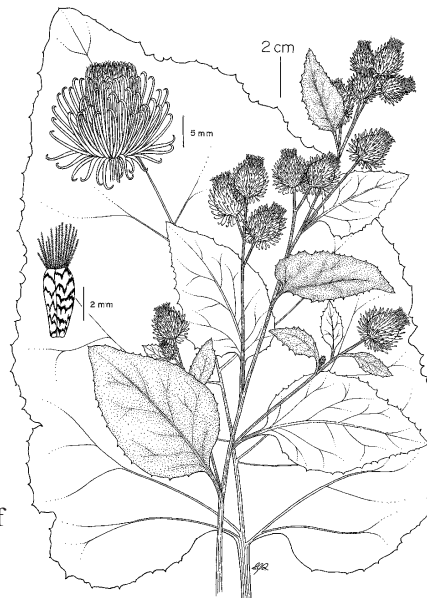
## Identification

**Growth form:** Biennial forb.

**Flower:** Flowers are purple, less than 2.5 cm across, and borne in short-stalked clusters along the stems.

**Seeds/Fruit:** Mature flower heads form a prickly bur that readily sticks to clothing or animals.

**Leaves:** Stem leaves are alternate, broadest at the leaf base, and somewhat diminished upward. Lower leaf stalks are hollow. Leaf margins are toothed or wavy, and the entire leaf is woolly beneath and dark green



above. Rosette leaves are large, hairy, and heart-shaped.

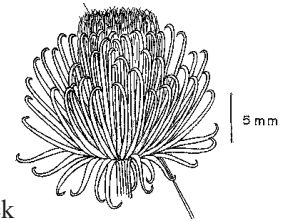
**Stems:** Mature plants are 1–3 m tall. The stem is erect, coarse, and much branched.

**Roots:** Large, fleshy taproot.

**Seedling:** Leaves of the rosette stage are large, simple, and usually heart-shaped (Stubbendieck et al. 1995).

### Similar Species

**Exotics:** Great burdock (*Arctium lappa* L.) is also listed as a regional noxious weed. Unlike common burdock, it has solid lower leaf stalks. Also, great burdock has individual flowers larger than 2.5 cm across, that are borne on long stalks and form a flat-topped cluster. Great burdock is quite rare in southern BC and is found on dry roadsides, disturbed areas, and pastures of low- to mid-elevations. Cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) has smaller, spiny-margined leaves.



**Natives:** None known.

## Impacts

**Agricultural:** Common burdock is not considered a problem in crops since it is intolerant to cultivation. Livestock are fond of common burdock, and the foliage imparts a bitter taste to the milk if it is eaten in large quantities. Common burdock burs can become entangled in the hair of sheep, damaging the quality and reducing the value of the wool.

**Ecological:** Due to its biennial nature, common burdock is confined to areas that are not severely disturbed on an annual basis.

**Human:** Because of its diuretic effects, common burdock has been listed as a poisonous plant (Gross et al. 1980).

## Habitat and Ecology

**General requirements:** Common burdock is found at low- to mid-elevations in grasslands and forests. It can commonly be found growing along roadsides, ditches, stream banks, pastures, and disturbed habitats. It often occurs in riparian areas that have moist, fertile soils with high nitrogen contents.

**Distribution:** Established throughout much of Canada and the US. It is frequent in coastal, west-central, and southern BC from low- to mid-elevations (Douglas et al. 1998). Burdock is a major concern in the Okanagan, Thompson, Cariboo, Omineca, and Peace regions, and is present in the Kootenay, Mainland, and Vancouver Island agricultural reporting regions.

**Historical:** Introduced from Eurasia.

**Life cycle:** Germination occurs mainly in early spring (Gross et al. 1980). During the first year, the plant

forms a rosette. The following year the plant produces a stout, grooved, rough stem with numerous branches. Flowering and seed production occur from July to September. Seeds are mature by September, depending on location, and are shed continuously throughout the autumn, winter, and following spring.

**Mode of reproduction:** By seed.

**Seed production:** Common burdock typically produces 6,000–16,000 seeds/plant.

**Seed bank:** No information available.

**Dispersal:** Bur-like seed heads are readily dispersed by attaching to animal fur or clothing.

**Hybridization:** Possibly hybridize with other *Arctium* species.

## Management

**Biocontrol:** None.

**Mechanical:** Tillage can be used to kill the plants at the rosette stage. Mowing or cutting can be used to eliminate seed production. Mow after the plant has bolted but before it has flowered.

**Fire:** No information available.

**Herbicides:** Common burdock can be controlled with 2,4-D, picloram, dicamba, or glyphosate. Herbicides are most effective when applied to first-year rosettes. Consult the most recent edition of BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Crop Production Guides for specific recommendations. **Before applying herbicides, read the label for full use and precautionary instructions.**

**Cultural/Preventive:** Prevent the establishment of new

infestations by minimizing disturbance and seed dispersal, eliminating seed production, and maintaining healthy native communities.

### Integrated Management Summary

As with other plants that reproduce solely by seed, integrated management efforts must include the elimination of seed production and the depletion of the seed bank. Combine herbicide or tillage treatment of rosettes with removal of seed heads from any plants that have bolted. Preventing dispersal of burs is particularly important.

## References

- Douglas, G. W., G. B. Straley, D. Meidinger, and J. Pojar, eds. 1998. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia*. Vol. 1: *Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons (Aceraceae through Asteraceae)*. Province of British Columbia.
- Gross, R. S., P. A. Werner, and W. Hawthorn. 1980. The biology of Canadian weeds. 38. *Arctium minus* (Hill) Bernh. and *A. lappa* L. *Canadian Journal of Plant Science* 60: 621–634.
- Stubbendieck, J., G. Y. Friisoe, and M. R. Bolick. 1995. Common burdock. *Weeds of Nebraska and the Great Plains*. Lincoln: Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry.

- Whitson, T. D. (ed.), L. C. Burrill, S. A. Dewey, D. W. Cudney, B. E. Nelson, R. D. Lee, R. Parker. 1996. Common burdock. *Weeds of the West*. Western Society of Weed Science, in cooperation with the Western United States Land Grant Universities Cooperative Extension Services, Newark, CA.

