Featured Pest



The Montana Noxious Weed List contains several Hawkweed species: Orange Hawkweed and the Meadow Hawkweed Complex, which includes two exotic species of Hawkweeds. Additionally, there are four species of native Hawkweeds in Montana and more than 700 species of Hawkweed worldwide. As one can guess, it is challenging to distinguish between the different species.

Description & Habitat

Native hawkweeds – not on the noxious weed list – are found in the western and central parts of Montana, but the exotic hawkweeds species, which are relatively new invaders from Europe, have primarily been found in northwest Montana. They prefer grasslands, moist open forests, roadsides, irrigated pasture and lawns.

The exotic species can be difficult to distinguish from the native. Both contain a milky sap and have a flowerhead that resembles a dandelion. All species are perennials that can regrow from their rhizomatous root system. Orange Hawkweed (above) is the only orange-flowered hawkweed in Montana, making it a little easier to identify. The rest of the exotic hawkweeds have yellow flowers.

Meadow Hawkweed (left) and Kingdevil are the two most common yellow-flowered exotic hawkweeds. They grow to 8-30 inches tall. Each rosette produces one stem which rarely has more than three leaves. The tall height and bare stem are the two easiest-to-distinguish characteristics when compared to native species. The exotic species can have stolons, which are runner roots like strawberries have. Meadow Hawkweed and Kingdevil are very difficult to tell apart. Overall, meadow hawkweed is "hairier" with a distinguishing type of hair. However, it may take a microscope and an expert to tell them apart.

Hawkweed plants reproduce by seeds in addition to their root system. Each tiny black seed has a tuft of hair that allows it to attach to hair, fur, clothing and vehicles or be carried by the wind. Exotic hawkweeds can quickly form dense patches that displace native plants. They can also be a problem in lawns and gardens.

Because hawkweeds are extremely invasive and can form dense patches quickly, a timely response with control options is crucial to keep the populations from exploding. Due to their brightly-colored flowers, hawkweeds can become major pests in lawns and gardens by being

TOP: orange hawkweed (Hieracium aurantiacum); ABOVE LEFT: Meadow hawkweed (Hieracium caespitosum)

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mistaken as wildflowers. It is important to remember that listed Montana noxious weeds cannot be actively cultivated no matter how pretty and colorful the flowers. Therefore, it is important to keep them out of gardens and natural areas due to their competitive nature, which can quickly take over an area.

Management

Prevention

In areas where the weed is not established, prevention is the primary goal. Long distance seed dispersal is through human activity, by being caught on vehicles or equipment or transported in contaminated seed or soil. Do not drive or walk in heavily weed-infested areas. Wash vehicles, ATVs and equipment before going home. Research has shown that seeds can travel over 160 miles on a vehicle in dry conditions.

Mechanical

Hand-pulling or digging is generally not effective, because it stimulates the root system to regrow. Mowing and grazing is effective at reducing seed production, but also stimulates vegetative growth.

Biological

There are currently no biological control options available. Due to so many native hawkweeds, it is unlikely that this will ever be an option. Livestock and wildlife do find the rosettes and buds to be palatable and the plants contain a moderate to high nutritive value.

Chemical

The best timing for herbicides is the spring when plants are in the rosette stage, unless otherwise indicated on the label. The most effective herbicides are Curtail, Forefront, Milestone, and Transline. Due to the hairy leaves, a surfactant is recommended to increase absorption. Always read and follow the label instructions when applying herbicides. Common chemical and trade names are used for clarity, but do not imply endorsement or non-endorsement of a product or brand.

Early detection is important for combatting this noxious weed. If you suspect you have a hawkweed, bring it to your local MSU Extension office or Weed District for identification.

Herbicide Active Ingredient Trade Name	Product per Acre	Application Timing or Growth Stage
Aminopyralid Milestone	4-6 ounces per acre	Bolting to flowering
Aminopyralid + 2,4-D ForeFront HL	1.5-2.1 pints per acre	Actively growing to flowering
Clopyralid + 2,4-D Curtail	2-2.6 pints per acre	Actively growing to flowering
Clopyralid Transline	⅔ – 1⅓ pints per acre	Rosette to Bolting