

Identification and Management of Common Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*)

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Common or Fuller's teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) is a native of Europe introduced to North America as early as the 1700s. It was valued as a horticultural plant and for use in wool "fleecing," or raising the nap on woolen cloth. Dried seed heads raise a soft, fluffy nap when fixed on a wheel or a cylinder and turned against the surface of cloth. The rigidity and elasticity of the seed head make it ideal for this purpose. Its roots are reported to have medicinal values ranging from a remedy for jaundice to a cleansing agent. It has escaped cultivation and is spreading rapidly throughout the United States except in the northern Great Plains. It is found in ornamental gardens and naturalizing along creeks and edges of ponds in Northern Nevada. In the West, it appears on the Colorado and New Mexico noxious weed lists.

What does teasel look like?

Teasel is a biennial or sometimes a perennial weed that dies after it flowers the first time. It has a strong taproot and coarse, prickly stems. Mature plants can grow up to 7 feet tall. The weed grows as a basal rosette at least one year, and then sends up a tall, flowering stalk in early summer. The rosette leaves are oval and wrinkled, and have margins with rounded or scalloped teeth. During the rosette stage, teasel develops a large taproot that may be more than 2 feet in length and 1 inch in diameter at the crown. The stem leaves are lanceolate, up to 10 inches long, simple and stalkless, and opposite. They have conspicuous veins, and clasp the stem, which branches in the upper part of the plant. The leaves form "cups" that may hold water. The small spines on the stem point downward.

Blooming occurs from July to August. The purple to white flowers are small, and packed in dense, egg-shaped flower heads that range from 1¼ inch to 4 inches long. Surrounding the flowers are spiny, awned bracts that make the flower heads bristly.



Teasel has prickly, highly branched stems that support bristly, egg-shaped flowers.
(photo courtesy of Steven Thorsted, CalPhoto)

Where does it grow?

Teasel prefers open, sunny areas and will tolerate a range of wet to dry conditions. It is found in pastures, seeps and sedge meadows as well as roadsides, dumps, and heavily disturbed soils. Teasel is often found around cemeteries, where the dried seed heads were used for decoration in flower arrangements.

How does it spread?

Teasel is spread by seed, and a single plant can produce more than 2,000 seeds, of which 30 percent to 80 percent may germinate the next spring. The seeds can remain viable for at least two years.

Why should we be concerned?

Teasel is spreading rapidly in America, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. It has colonized many areas along interstates. The weed is too prickly and bitter to be eaten by wild foragers or livestock. When teasel invades waysides, native meadows, and neglected pastures, it crowds out desirable forage and plants if it is allowed to reseed. Teasel can be an aggressive competitor in disturbed areas, where its tremendous seed production and high germination rates allow it to quickly invade and outcompete other plants.

How is teasel controlled?

The key to controlling teasel is to prevent seed production while exhausting the seed bank. Research suggests that teasel does not reproduce if sufficient root is removed by digging. In natural areas or lightly infested areas, flowering stems can be cut and bagged for disposal. If the stalk is cut prior to flowering, the weed will send up a new flowering stalk. If removed after flowering and before the seed is mature or has been released, teasel's spread can be prevented. Prescribed burns may be used to make teasel rosettes easier to find, however fire will not carry well through dense stands of rosettes or mature plants. Burning alone will not eradicate populations. Maintenance of healthy native communities will help prevent re-infestation.

No biological controls are currently available for teasel. A variety of herbicides will provide control if applied to rosettes in the spring or fall. Applying 2,4-D amine at a rate of 1 pound active ingredient per acre (ai/A) is

effective. A combination of 0.75 pound ai/A of 2,4-D and 0.125 ai/A of dicamba is also effective. A mixture of triclopyr and clopyralid (Redeem R&P®) applied at 1.5 pints per acre applied to actively growing plants is also effective. The sulfonyl urea compounds, chlorsulfuron (0.75 ounces ai/A) and metsulfuron (0.6 ounces ai/A), may be applied to actively growing teasel in the rosette stage. While these two products give long-term broadleaf control, they may interfere with future reseeding for several years. A nonionic surfactant should be used to increase effectiveness of most herbicides.

References:

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