Stork's Bill *(Erodium cicutarium)*

Provincial Designation: None

Overview:

This member of the geranium family is a biennial or winter annual (germinates in the fall and flowers the following growing season) that reproduces by seed only. It has a slender taproot about 8cm long and fibrous, secondary roots. Stork's bill is fast growing – flowering occurs in early spring, allowing the plant to complete its life cycle even where the growing season is short. Stork's bill is an alternate host for some plant diseases and was introduced from Europe as early as the 1700's.

Habitat:

Stork's bill tolerates a broad range of climate and soils – from clay to sand, moist to dry – and will tolerate partial shade. Plants can mature under conditions of low temperatures and moisture.


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Identification:

Stems: Stems can be upright or trailing and grow from 0.5 to 2m long. Stems are reddish in color and have many fine hairs.

Leaves: Leaves are hairy, divided into feathery lobes or toothed segments and can grow to 30cm long. Seedlings have 3-lobed cotyledons.

Flowers: Flowers have 5 petals and their color ranges from pink to purple. Flowers (usually 2 or more) are borne on umbrella-like clusters at the end of long, slender stalks.

Seed: Plant ovaries have long (2.5-5cm) styles ('beaks' or 'stork's bills') that coil at maturity and envelope the seed at their base. The styles uncoil in moist weather, driving the seed into the ground.

Prevention:

This plant requires disturbance to become established – prevention means maintaining healthy, desirable plant cover. Stork's bill is a serious competitor in some agricultural crops and its seed is difficult to clean from small seeded crops. This plant can be spread by contaminated grain, feed, straw, manure and machinery.


Seedling

Control:

Early season control efforts are necessary since this plant matures quickly and much sooner than both crop and non-crop vegetation.

Grazing: May cause livestock poisoning.

Cultivation: May be effective on new infestations before seed production. Repeated cultivation (many times through growing season) may help to eliminate the seed bank.

Mechanical: To eliminate seed production, mow or burn infestations before flowering.

Chemical:[1] Early season applications of 2,4-D or dicamba can be effective. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

Biological: None researched to date.

1 Always follow the product labels. The use of pesticides in any manner not published on the label or registered under the *Minor Use of Pesticides* regulation constitutes an offence under both the *Federal Pest Control Products Act and Alberta's Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act.*

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