

# Bighead Knapweed

*Centaurea macrocephala*

Sunflower Family

## Class A Noxious Weed: Eradication Required

### Identification Tips

- Perennial plant, up to 5 feet tall
- Single, showy, bright yellow flowerhead at tops of stems
- Bracts (found under the flower head) are golden brown and fringed
- Multiple unbranched leafy stems grow from a taprooted woody crown
- Broadly lance-shaped leaves with sharp, pointed tips are rough to the touch and up to 15 inches long at the base of the plant
- Various common names including Lemon Fluff, Globe Centaury and Pineapple Thistle

### Biology

- Similar to other knapweeds, it is a member of the thistle tribe and the sunflower family
- Reproduces by seed which can be spread by wind, passing animals, humans, vehicles or equipment
- Can re-sprout from woody root crown
- Flowers July to September

### Impacts

- Out-competes grasses and other forage species, reducing food sources for wildlife and livestock
- Difficult to remove once established

### Distribution

- Cultivated as an ornamental flower for sale in fresh flower markets; also found for sale in seed catalogs
- Very limited distribution in Washington state; it has become a significant problem in a few eastern Washington counties
- Found in gardens, yards, and pastures
- Does well in loam and silt loam soils
- Also establishes quickly in newly disturbed areas such as industrial sites or under powerlines



*Native to Turkey and Romania, this plant was brought here as a garden ornamental, but has proven to be invasive in grasslands and mountain meadows.*



*Prized for its showy flowers, this plant has been found escaping from gardens, spreading to nearby pasture areas, reducing forage for wildlife and livestock.*

### Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control  
Program Line: 206-296-0290  
[www.kingcounty.gov/weeds](http://www.kingcounty.gov/weeds)

## What You Can Do

The King County Noxious Weed Control Program is actively trying to stop the spread of bighead knapweed. Unfortunately, this plant is sometimes collected and even cultivated as an ornamental which has resulted in an even greater distribution in our area. It has even been found for sale at local farmer's markets. If you see this plant, please call our office. By stopping seed production and removing existing plants, infestations will be eliminated from the state over time.

## Control Methods

For best results, control methods should be adaptive and employed throughout several growing seasons.

**Manual:** Isolated small populations can be dug out using a shovel or stout trowel, making sure to remove all the roots. Hand pulling, however, is mostly ineffective due to breakage--the remaining plant will resprout from the crown. Once confident that all the roots have been removed, replant with ground cover, grass or other desirable plants. Watch for regrowth from seeds. It is unknown how long seeds remain viable in the soil for this species.

**Mechanical:** Repeated mowing may suppress the plants' ability to produce seed, but plants will re-grow and flower again after a single mowing. Tilling and cultivation that buries seeds and plant matter below a depth of one and half inches can be effective, especially if the area is replanted with a healthy cover crop.

**Chemical:** Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. **Certain herbicides cannot be used in aquatic areas or their buffers.** Check the label for any site-specific restrictions. 2,4-D and triclopyr are effective at time of stem elongation (usually May to June) before flowers open. These products are selective for broadleaf plants and will not

harm grasses that help suppress new knapweed seedlings. Glyphosate (e.g. Roundup) is also effective but will kill grasses as well. When using glyphosate, follow by seeding or planting with appropriate species. Apply glyphosate when most plants are at bud stage. Apply herbicide to the entire leaf and stem surface of actively growing plants; do not cut the



Diffuse



Meadow



Spotted

### Other Knapweeds:

Several other invasive knapweeds are found in King County. Three of the more common ones are **Diffuse** (*Centaurea diffusa*), **Meadow** (*Centaurea jacea x nigra*) and **Spotted** (*Centaurea stoebe*). All of these share many of the same traits as bighead knapweed and all have the same negative impacts on the landscape: they crowd out native vegetation and impair the quality of wildlife habitat and pastures.

stem after applying the herbicide since this will stop the plant from absorbing the chemical. An area of heavy seedling infestation can be efficiently controlled by an herbicide application in spring, followed by an application in the fall if needed.

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**King County**

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Water and Land Resources Division  
**Noxious Weed Control Program**  
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