

# Buffalobur

*Solanum rostratum*

Nightshade Family

## Class C Noxious Weed: Control Required

### Identification Tips

- Annual plant with spiny leaves, flowers and stems
- Entire plant covered with straight, sharp spines; even seedlings have spines
- Grows up to two feet tall with multi-branched stems
- Deeply lobed, veined leaves that resemble watermelon leaves, up to 5 inches long
- Bright yellow flowers approximately 1 inch wide with 5 petals joined at base of stem
- Forms spiny, bur-like fruits

### Biology

- Flowers from mid-summer to first frost
- Spreads entirely by seed
- Flowers produce a fruit with seeds enclosed by an enlarged spiny calyx or “bur”
- Up to 8,500 seeds are produced per plant
- When mature, the main stem breaks off, tumbles in the wind, helping to spread seeds
- Burs are also moved by animals, rain, human activity
- Plants are self-fertile so a single plant can build a large population quickly under favorable conditions

### Impacts

- Contains an alkaloid that can poison livestock
- Burs can become tangled in the wool of sheep, causing loss of value
- Spines can cause puncture wounds and makes this plant unpalatable as a food for wildlife and livestock

### Distribution

- Limited distribution in King County; found in disturbed areas, roadsides, yards and pastures
- Likes sandy soil, but will also grow on dry, hard soils and moist soils in cultivated fields

### Questions?

King County Noxious Weed Control  
Program Line: **206-477-WEED**  
[www.kingcounty.gov/weeds](http://www.kingcounty.gov/weeds)



*Due to its limited distribution in King County and impact to agricultural lands, buffalobur is a Class A weed; eradication is required by law.*



*Beware of the sharp spines which can cause puncture wounds.*

## Control Methods

Buffalobur is found in fields, overgrazed pastures, yards, roadsides, waste areas and barn yards. It will grow in sandy soils, as well as dry hard soils to rich moist soils of cultivated fields. If you find buffalobur on your property, choose one or a combination of the control methods listed below. **If you see it on property that is not yours, please call the King County Noxious Weed Control Program at 206-296-0290 to report the location.**

**Prevention:** Preventing seed production is fundamental to its eradication, so control efforts should be undertaken before flowering. Also, buffalobur can be suppressed by maintaining a competitive vegetative cover.

**Manual:** For small sites with few plants, pull or dig up plants before seed heads form. Because of the sharp spines, be sure to always wear sturdy gloves. If you can't remove all the root, use a shovel to cut the plant off about one inch below the ground so the plant will not re-sprout. Chopping the leaves from one side of the plant can provide access to the central growing point. To be fully effective, all mature burs need to be bagged and removed so no new seeds are left on the site. Immature seeds can continue to develop in cut plants, and the less stem that remains attached to the flower head, the faster the seed head will dry out.

**Mechanical:** Plants can be controlled by frequent cultivation. Prevention of seed production is possible with repeated, close mowing or hoeing out plants before flowers appear. For mature plants, clear dense stands with manually operated tools: brush cutters, machetes or loppers. Cut plants below ground level to prevent regrowth. Clean equipment and take care to avoid spreading mature seeds to un-infested areas.

**Cultural:** Maintain healthy, competitive grasses in pastures by fertilizing, reseeding and using proper pasture management techniques.

**Chemical:** Follow labels exactly as written and only use products appropriate and legal for the site. Herbicides should only be applied at the rates specified on the label. Be aware there may be additional herbicide restrictions when pastures are grazed, especially by lactating dairy animals. Herbicides with the active ingredient dicamba and 2,4-D can be effective in controlling buffalobur and should be applied prior to flowering. Look for products containing these active ingredients under different brand names. Spot treatment using glyphosate (a product such as Roundup) will also control buffalobur, but this product also kills grass so don't use in pastures or lawns.

*What's in your Bird Seed?*



Buffalobur is sometimes found under bird feeders as a result of feed mixture contaminated with buffalobur seeds. Look for bird feed that is produced locally and/or ones that contain only one type of seed/feed such as black-oil sunflower seeds or cracked corn. Avoid mixes purchased online that are coming from out-of-state since those can contain buffalobur seeds as this weed is very common in other parts of the country and not regulated there.