

Hounds Tongue

Identification:

1. Biennial in the Borage family
2. First year plants form a rosette of long, rough, hairy, tongue-shaped leaves
3. Second year plants are 1 to 4 feet tall with stout, upright stems, usually branched above
4. Entire plant covered with long, soft hairs
5. Plants have several narrow flower clusters, slightly coiled
6. Flowers dull reddish-purple, drooping slightly along slender stalks, about 1/3 inch wide
7. Leaves alternate, long and narrow, smaller higher up the stem, 1 to 3 inches wide, rough, hairy, lacking teeth and lobes, with distinctive veins
8. Lower leaves up to a foot long and resemble a hound's tongue, broader at the tips and tapering to a petiole (leaf stalk) at the base; upper leaves are reduced, narrower, and lack petioles (stalks)
9. Plants have a thick, black, woody taproot that can reach 3 feet deep
10. Each flower produces four nutlets (seeds), about 1/3 inch long, that break apart at maturity and cling to clothing and animals
11. Nutlets are brown to grayish-brown, rounded triangular in shape, and covered with short, hooked bristles



Habitat and Impact:

Usually found in pastures, along roadsides, forest rangelands, abandoned fields and disturbed habitats. It is becoming more common in Utah and throughout the Mountain West. Houndstongue causes a loss of pasture and range for grazing animals. In addition to being a nuisance to recreationists due to its bur-like seeds, houndstongue is toxic and has the potential to poison domestic animals and wildlife that might graze on this plant or eat it mixed in with hay. Plants become more palatable when dry or after herbicide treatment. Animals are most likely to consume houndstongue in contaminated hay.



Houndstongue remains toxic when dry, and cattle and horses have died in the U.S. from eating hay contaminated with houndstongue. Symptoms are varied but may include digestive disturbances, restlessness, lack of coordination, convulsions and coma. Symptoms may develop anywhere from a few days to several weeks or months after animals have eaten the plants. Once symptoms are obvious, an animal may die within a few days. There is no specific treatment, just supportive treatment for the symptoms and removing the source of poisoning.

When livestock are exposed to houndstongue, the seeds attach to the animal. In addition to creating a nuisance by getting into wool and fur, the burs can become embedded in the eye or eyelids and cause eye damage in animals.

Houndstongue prefers forest sites and thrives especially well in forest openings cleared by logging operations and road construction. Houndstongue is shade-tolerant and not tolerant of drier grassland areas with less than 12 inches of annual rain.