



BONNER COUNTY NOXIOUS WEEDS

1500 Hwy 2, Suite 101 • Sandpoint, ID 83864 • Phone: (208) 255-5681ext.6
<http://bonnercounty.us/noxious-weeds>

Weed of the Month

By Chase Youngdahl

One year in to contributing these 'Weed of the Month' columns I feel it is time to address the elephant in the room and present the household name noxious weed (at least the closest thing to it), Spotted Knapweed. If you're a landowner in Bonner County odds are you have battled or are battling this purple-flowered monster...or you could be overwhelmed by it and not know what it is or what to do about it. My objective is to provide some solid information and helpful tips.

In the sunflower family, **Spotted Knapweed** (*Centaurea stoebe*) is a native of Eurasia and is a state listed noxious weed confirmed to infest all 44 counties in Idaho to some degree or another. It's a hardy perennial and a vicious competitor; has a strong taproot that can propagate new plants, however the main mechanism of spread is by seed, each plant is capable of producing 25,000 of them. These seeds are relatively heavy and do not disperse more than a few feet on their own—they need to be carried by animals, equipment, clothing, etc. The most recognizable identifying factor is the purple disk flowers emerging from the bulb-like tips of the stems. These bulbous looking (not truly bulbs) stem tips are peppered with black spotted bracts, hence the common name Spotted Knapweed. Bract is a botanical term for a specialized leaf associated with flower parts. The stems branch out from clusters of basal leaves, which are deeply lobed. It can remain in rosette form for a couple of years [sometimes longer] before bolting.

Spotted Knapweed can be found in rangelands, pastures, roadsides, dry meadows, vacant lots and any such disturbed sites. It crowds out native and desirable vegetation, eventually creating a monoculture where all of the available resources in the given area are going to sustain the Spotted Knapweed stand due to its aggression. It's a non-palatable and poisonous weed for pasture animals as well as worthless browse for wildlife. Proper land management if you don't have Spotted Knapweed or a proper treatment regimen if you do have it is key.

There are numerous control options, and the best one will depend on the size of the infestation and what your management objectives are for the particular area. Mechanical control for small and/or early detected infestations is effective, remember that Spotted Knapweed remains in rosette form for two or more years before bolting, rosettes are easier to deal with on a mechanical control level than fully mature plants. They can be dug or pulled out of the soil when conditions are somewhat moist—if it's too dry the likelihood of breaking the root off and not being able to fully extract it is high, rendering your efforts futile. Mowing typically does nothing to control it, the plants will adapt and flower close to the ground; mowing can be a one-time solution to stop the bleeding late in the growing season and keep a mature stand from going to seed that year, but thereafter it will flower below the mower blade level.



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Mulches in gardens and landscape beds, be it bark or plastic, is a great option for control in those scenarios; the mulch should be 3-4 inches deep to prevent sunlight from reaching the soil. Cultural control applies best to pastures in the case of Spotted Knapweed—keeping a healthy stand of pasture grasses helps to outcompete the Knapweeds, don't allow an area to be overgrazed. Many herbicide options for control of Spotted Knapweed exist and which product to use for a particular situation depends on a number of factors. Call the Bonner County Weeds office to discuss details and we can assist in narrowing down the best one for the given set of circumstances. With that said, some options include the following: Milestone® (aminopyralid), Opensight® (aminopyralid + metsulfuron), Curtail®/Cody® (clopyralid + 2,4-D amine), Weedmaster® (dicamba + 2,4-D amine), Crossbow® (triclopyr + 2,4-D ester). Application timing is best in the spring or early summer when plants are actively growing but prior to flowering, however control can be achieved until the flowers lose color in late summer. Treating rosettes throughout the fall prior to hard freezing is also an effective time to make an herbicide application. There is a well-established biological control program in place for Spotted Knapweed, tens of thousands of bio-control agents have been released throughout Bonner County by private landowners and government agencies. A seed head feeder and a root mining weevil are the two primary agents, and provide a moderate amount of control over a span of several years. My observation is the bio-control agents will eventually weaken the plants—they will appear smaller, less robust and off-color. The bio-control option is a great tool for areas that are difficult to manage otherwise, just keep in mind eradication is not a realistic outcome; the goal is to weaken the population enough for native vegetation to compete. Contact the Bonner County Weeds office if you wish to obtain the Spotted Knapweed root weevils for release on your property. Think spring!