

Dyer's Woad

Isatis tinctoria

A Commercial Crop or an Aggressive Invader?

Dyer's woad is one of many weeds that are more easily seen during the fall. Woad is an herbaceous cruciferous (mustard) plant that produces distinctive seed pods. It is these seed pods that make the plant stand out from other fall vegetation. The pendant fruits range from black to blue to purplish-black. Although only $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide, the mass of hanging pods makes identification easy.

The plant has been cultivated for centuries in Europe as a medicinal herb and a source of blue dye. It is currently a commercial crop in the UK. It was originally introduced in the eastern United States by early settlers. It is believed to have been imported to California in contaminated alfalfa seed in the early 1900's. Dyer's woad has spread throughout Northern California and is currently expanding throughout the west. It has invaded dense stands of medusahead, bulbous bluegrass, and cheatgrass. It reduces forage availability and has low palatability to grazers. The weed will also invade crop land, especially where dryland agriculture is used. It has a five foot taproot and takes years to eliminate an invasion.

Woad is an aggressive weed that initially invades roadsides and then moves into adjacent fields and rangelands. Although it has not been identified in Asotin County, it is one of the plants that the Asotin Weed Office surveys for in the fall. Identifying and eradicating small infestations of aggressive weeds is critical to avoiding larger problems in the future.

